

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM  
IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF FLORA TRISTAN (1803-1844)

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## Abstract

Flora Tristan was one of the earliest activists for feminism and socialism and campaigned under the July Monarchy in France. This thesis aims to highlight the relationship between feminism and socialism through the medium of Flora Tristan's life and work.

It is based on a chronological study of her writings to illustrate how her egalitarian feminism developed from her personal circumstances and flourished into literature. It focusses mainly on the evolution of her ideas as she rejected both egalitarian and messianic feminism in favour of socialist militancy among the French working class. Her effort to insert feminism, as a high priority, into the nascent socialist movement, is closely scrutinised.

In the light of more recent developments in France, the conclusion suggests that her life's work was a microcosm of the relationship between feminism and socialism as it was to develop after her death in 1844.

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To Conrad

## Abbreviations

In order to simplify the reference system, I have placed the primary source references immediately after quotations. Unless otherwise indicated, the following editions have been used:

Lettres: Flora Tristan, réunies, présentées et annotées par Stéphane Michaud (Paris: Seuil, 1980). 261p.

Néphis, roman (Paris: Ladvocat, 1838). 2 tomes reliés en 1 vol in-8°, 365+392p. (B.N.: Y<sup>2</sup> 7182271823)

Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères (Paris: chez Delaunay, 1835), 27p. (B.N.: RP 7322)

Dieu Franchise Liberté Pétition pour l'abolition de la peine de mort à la Chambre des Députés le 10 décembre 1838 (Paris: Imprimerie de Mme Huzard, 1838). Archives Nationales (Archives de la Chambre des Députés, Pétition no.139, dossier 70) See Appendix II.

Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce à Messieurs les Députés le 20 décembre 1837 (Paris: Imprimerie de Mme Huzard, 1838). Archives Nationales (Archives de la Chambre des Députés, Pétition no. 133, dossier 71) See Appendix II.

Pérégrinations d'une Paria 1833-1834: Flora Tristan (Paris: Maspéro: La Découverte, 1979), 376p.

Promenades dans Londres ou l'aristocratie et les prolétaires anglais: Flora Tristan, édition établie et commentée par François Bédarida (Paris: Collection du Centre d'histoire du syndicalisme, Maspéro, 1978), 358p.

Le tour de France: Etat actuel de la classe ouvrière sous l'aspect moral, intellectuel et matériel, journal inédit de Flora Tristan, réédité par Michel Collinet, texte et notes établis par Jules-L. Puech, introduction nouvelle de Stéphane Michaud. 2 tomes (Paris: Maspéro, La Découverte, 1980), Tome 1: 239p., Tome 2: 239p.

Union Ouvrière, 3<sup>e</sup> édition de 1844, facsimile edition (Paris: Editions d'histoire sociale, 1969), 136p.

All other references are given as footnotes at the end of each chapter

## Introduction

If one were to single out an enduring controversy surrounding Flora Tristan, it would be over the manner in which she could be described as a feminist. In this thesis it is intended to assess the radical scope of Flora Tristan's feminism and to show that her importance lies in her attempt to insert feminism as a high priority into the nascent socialist movement. The conclusion will show how this question of the relationship between feminism and socialism has remained a crucial one in modern radicalism.

Although the life and work of Flora Tristan form the background of this research, the critique of feminism and socialism is equally important. When I decided to embark on this topic of research, my intention was to show that feminism and socialism have common roots, and that clarification of their relationship was lacking. I chose Flora Tristan believing her to be an exemplary figure in combining feminism and socialism: not least because in her short life she combined them both in theory and in action. Little or no extensive analysis of how she had done so has appeared in print.

In assessing Flora Tristan's life and work, I wanted to get beyond the demonstration that Flora Tristan's personal circumstances were instrumental in her development as a feminist and socialist activist.

My study was not intended as a purely biographical one; there are many biographies in print and what is more important, no matter how exceptional, the singular woman's contribution to the feminist story is incomplete unless it is related in some way to the overall development of feminism. This relation is what I have set out to explore.

In undertaking this study of Flora Tristan, inevitably I have been drawn into an appraisal of the relationship between feminism and socialism. There are, of course, conflicting interpretations of how feminism and socialism are associated. Are feminism and socialism potential bed-fellows or are they doomed to perpetual antagonism? Is it not simply that their paths have crossed in the past and may possibly do so in the future given the right conditions? Can they mutually benefit one another?

I have restricted myself to an analysis of the way in which feminism and socialism interact, rather than to have presented a particular opinion on how they should be related. There are problems, however, in any attempt to deal with the two vast regions of feminism and socialism. Within the confines of this thesis I cannot claim to have made an exhaustive study of either ideology let alone to have produced a definitive account of their relationship.

An added complication lies in the fact that the two ideologies have developed very considerably since the first half of the nineteenth century. Flora Tristan is not a feminist by 1988 standards. The term feminism did not even exist in her lifetime. Socialism has also much

changed since the early utopian period of Flora Tristan's day. The development of her political thought, culminating in a socialist plan for working class solidarity, reveals a pertinent analysis of women's oppression, but her feminist perspective was limited. The question may then arise: why study the life and work of someone who lived a hundred and fifty years ago if the contemporary feminist movement has widened its horizons to such an extent so as to render Flora Tristan somewhat passé? My answer to this is that the essence of her message is just as relevant today as in the nineteenth century for the simple reason that the relationship between feminism and socialism in France and elsewhere remains a very thorny one, and as later developments have shown, gains made by women in recent years are by no means permanent acquisitions.<sup>(1)</sup> Moreover, so long as feminists and socialists are looking for ways of implementing a combined programme to further their aims, a study of one of their predecessors is useful.

Feminists of the late twentieth century attach great importance to reassessing the past, as do socialists. For feminists today, the historical study is part of women's search for their identity. It is not by accident therefore that there has been a great output of material on the history of feminism in recent years. Indeed it is for this very reason that there is no shortage of biographical work on Flora Tristan despite the fact that she was neglected for sixty or so years after her premature death in 1844. However, as I indicate in the first chapter, this historical neglect and subsequent miracle of resurrection can no longer be used as sole justification for a study of her work.

I do in fact begin with a critical assessment of the major studies of Flora Tristan in the first chapter. I consider it would be more pertinent to examine the assumptions underlying the studies of her life and work in order to appreciate the impact she has had so far, and to indicate the need for further analysis, rather than to rehearse the familiar story of her life. For the reader's benefit I have, however, included a synopsis of her life as Appendix I.

As far as the organisation of chapters is concerned, after much consideration, I found it was best to approach Flora Tristan's work in chronological order, as each work corresponds to a particular development in her theory and action and highlights different elements fundamental to the relationship between feminism and socialism.

Chapter Two is an analysis of her early works, pamphlet, petitions and travel journal. It contains the background to Flora Tristan's development as a writer and her first statement of the principles of sex and class equality. This egalitarian position emphasises the identical nature or ultimate sameness of men and women in terms of economic, social and political equality. This same egalitarian position, however, highlights the contradictions between the reality and the potential role of men and women within the family and the economic system, that is, between the aspirations and their actual status within the capitalist system. As a result, Flora Tristan denounced the oppression she discovered and began a search for a way to end this oppression. Her action for implementing change included petitions to the *Assemblée Nationale*, the only political legal option for women at the time. I have

included these petitions as Appendix II. However, Flora Tristan soon recognised the limitations of egalitarianism as a critique of society. She was also dissatisfied with her method of campaign for change through specific demands. This chapter therefore includes an assessment of the importance of egalitarian feminism as the forerunner of the liberal and bourgeois traditions. Flora Tristan's search for a solution to oppression widened her horizons because, at the same time, while recognising her own limitations, she was becoming increasingly influenced by certain contemporary thinkers towards a more romantic version of feminism and socialism.

Chapter Three looks at the idea of the "woman guide for humanity", and of the proletariat, as a very important part of humanity in her only novel *Néphis*. In contrast to the preceding chapter, the complementary nature of the sexes is extolled. As a consequence of this search for identity a much less specific call for change is outlined, although the depth of perception of the possible link between socialism and feminism is strengthened. I could usefully illustrate the modern parallel here. It seems that once feminists become absorbed in the question of the nature of womanhood or female identity, they become less attached to a specific programme for change, as did Flora Tristan when writing her novel. After the initial demands for reform in the early 1970s, many feminist groups became much more introspective and philosophical in their search for Woman's identity. This philosophical element, unique to French feminists, entailed a certain distancing from the campaign for specific demands for women, and, as a consequence, from socialism.(2) In *Néphis*, although Flora Tristan's nascent socialism remains secondary

to the principal idea of messianic feminism, it already colours the critique of society in a different hue. The conclusion to the romantic idealisation of the cause of humanity is that Flora Tristan rejects the novel form and broadens her analysis further into a more specific critique of the capitalist system. Thus, a second type of feminism, visionary or messianic feminism, is examined in this chapter. Again it is found to be inadequate, as indeed is Art, as a medium of action.

Chapter Four shows a consolidation of Flora Tristan's socialism based on a political, economic and social analysis of an advanced capitalist country, England, in her observations of London life in Promenades dans Londres. The common thread of feminism and socialism is seen in the analysis of the nature of oppression: the inescapable position of women and workers from their exploitation. The distinction now exists in this work between a theory of female oppression by class and a doctrine of feminism as a programme for change. The question becomes one of how to collectivise women in such different circumstances. The hurdles are so numerous that stalemate is reached as far as developing feminism goes. The only outlet for feminists is the suggestion that writing can galvanise women, otherwise imprisoned, into action, to help one another. Again, there are parallels with feminism in France in the 1970s when writing became an essential form of action. The nature of power in society and the structures which affect women in different classes provide a further link with socialism.

Chapter Five discusses Flora Tristan's feminist socialist programme for change. The conclusion to her study of capitalism leads to the



choice of Union Ouvrière as a proposition for change, a method of action, and as a synthesis of egalitarianism, socialism and feminism. It contains the aim to achieve emancipation of the working class and women embodied in the plan for working class solidarity, wherein was emphasised economic and social equality of the classes. There was a deliberate effort by Flora Tristan to include all women. The figure of Woman as the moral salvation of the whole of the working class returns. Egalitarianism is included in the synthesis because there is a return to the position of sameness, not complementarity of sexual roles, within the plan. Feminism is implicit in that there is no separate action prescribed for the achievement of emancipation of women. Nevertheless this chapter includes a detailed assessment of the new role for women in the family and in the labour force as outlined in Union Ouvrière.

Chapter Six illustrates the reality facing Flora Tristan as she tries to implement her plan, divided in her loyalties between ideals and practice. Le Tour de France, her unpublished diary, shows gaps in her socialist analysis; for instance, there is no talk of the working class capturing the means of production. Flora Tristan's plan for Union Ouvrière was badly received by the working class in general and by women in particular. The leaders of the working class would not accept Flora Tristan's feminist ideas. This chapter also analyses Flora Tristan's limited view of potential change in family structure and labour organisations. Her idea that the working class must ensure the full benefits of the 1789 revolution, by developing class solidarity and acting for themselves, does not extend to women.

Chapter Seven discusses the subsequent development of the relationship between feminism and socialism and suggests that some of the polemical differences between modern feminists and socialists have been resolved to a certain extent by acknowledging a common heritage.

### Footnotes to the Introduction

- 1 As an example, the elevation to the post of cabinet minister of the minister for women's rights under the socialist government in 1981 proved shortlived.
- 2 For an example of literary and philosophical approaches to feminism, see Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, editors, New French Feminisms (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981). Claire Duchon gives an assessment of feminist activists in France in Feminism in France: from May 1968 to Mitterrand (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986)

## Chapter One

### FLORA TRISTAN: THE IMAGE AND IDENTITY OF A FEMINIST SOCIALIST

#### (1) THE CHANGING FACE OF FLORA TRISTAN'S IMAGE

Flora Tristan's image has altered radically during the last one hundred and sixty years. Indeed, as this chapter will show, there are now so many facets of Flora Tristan's life and work that have been scrutinised that one could speak of different sets of images. In part one of this chapter, I shall explore the changing face of these images and suggest some explanations for the metamorphosis. In part two I shall discuss two of the three central dimensions which occur in the different sets of images:

- the biographical characteristics of Flora Tristan's life especially in terms of being an outcast, heroine, victim:
- the literary characteristics of Flora Tristan's writings in terms of being a romantic novelist, documentarist and proselytiser.

In part three I shall discuss the third and most powerful dimension which occurs in the different sets of images:

- that of Flora Tristan's practical and theoretical contribution to socialism and to feminism.

My conclusion in this chapter will be that Flora Tristan's identity lies in the transcending of the biographical and literary images by the political images. However, her dual political image (feminist and socialist) actually creates a fractured and split political identity mirroring the tension between the two ideologies themselves. The complex nature of the relationship between feminism and socialism makes her political image all the more fascinating. The thesis will therefore be concerned with a much closer examination of this political image than has hitherto been carried out.

In Jules-L. Puech's words, Flora Tristan was the ancestor of feminism and socialism:

... au milieu de tous les penseurs et de tous les rêveurs, de tous les réformateurs et de tous les utopistes ... on découvre en Flora Tristan l'ancêtre du mouvement féministe et du socialisme ouvrier. (1)

Flora Tristan's fame and fortune have gone hand in hand with those of feminism and socialism, and although her feminism and socialism were of an early type, her ideas still have relevance today: hence the continuing interest in her work. Indeed after the events of 1968, Flora Tristan quickly achieved heights of respectability hitherto unknown in socialist or feminist circles.

It is no coincidence that most of her works were republished for the first time since her death in the decade of the *M.L.F.*, (2) and that the socialist, Yvette Roudy, attended the Flora Tristan Conference in Dijon in 1984 in her capacity as *Ministre des Droits de la Femme*. (3)

Flora Tristan is chiefly known today as a rediscovery, but despite many years of neglect after her untimely death in 1844, she was not entirely forgotten. Her disappearance from the annals of history is usually attributed to the consequence of the establishment of the Second Empire, a period of repression of socialist activities and a further entrenchment of conservative values as far as the role of women was concerned.(4) But there are more complex reasons for her neglect than this repression during the Second Empire. After all, Marxism and other schools of socialist thought continued to thrive, admittedly elsewhere.

A more perceptive interpretation of her neglect by modern feminists is specifically directed against the very scientific socialists who ignored her. There is evidence to indicate that she was known to Marx and Engels, who acknowledge her contribution to socialism in the work they were currently producing, The Holy Family (published in February 1845), when they defended her against an attack by the Bauer brothers:

The worker creates nothing, because his work remains individual, having only his individual needs as its object, that is because in the present world system the individual interconnected branches of labour are separated from and even opposed to, one another; in short because labour is not *organised*. Criticism's own proposition, if taken in the only reasonable sense it can possibly have, demands the organisation of labour. Flora Tristan, in an assessment of whose work this great proposition appears, puts forward the same demand and is treated a *canaille* for her insolence in anticipating Critical Criticism. (5)

So why, as Desanti and Dijkstra ask,(6) did Engels not acknowledge her Promenades dans Londres as one of his sources in writing The Condition of the Working Class in England? The answer suggested by

Desanti and Dijkstra is partly because Marx and Engels were just as guilty of male chauvinism as their conservative counterparts, and partly because they assumed their version of socialism, a scientific one, to be superior to utopian socialism - their view of the value of Flora Tristan's contribution to socialism was that she belonged to the utopian era and that it was therefore inadequate, to be discarded.

Armogathe gives a further explanation for Flora Tristan's neglect. He attributes it to the poor reception of her ideas among the feminists of 1848 even though that year saw the starting up of some workers' associations by women, similar to Flora Tristan's Union Ouvrière, such as the one initiated by Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland(7):

Mais d'une façon générale, ce qui frappe au contraire c'est « l'oubli », « l'effacement », dans lequel les femmes révolutionnaires de 1848 tiennent Flora Tristan. J'ai peut-être trouvé la clef de cette attitude dans un numéro de journal *La Voix des Femmes* où l'ultra-moralisme des rédactrices, tout en saluant l'importance des réflexions théoriques de Flora, s'applique à lui retirer toute espèce de supériorité sur le plan moral. Ainsi, quatre ans après sa mort, Flora choque donc encore par sa vie privée le petit groupe des femmes d'avant-garde dont beaucoup pourtant l'ont connue. (8)

This reaction was a rejection of what were considered to be the eccentric fringes of the utopian socialist era, fringes which had explored the possibility of alternative family structures and sexuality. For instance, Fourier's ideas on sexuality were ridiculed by his opponents or quietly discarded by Considérant, his disciple.(9) It will be recalled that Enfantin and some of his followers had been imprisoned

in the early 1830s for dubious behaviour which could threaten public morality.(10)

In comparison with the economic priorities of scientific socialism, questions concerning the family structure under capitalism were considered as marginal, and issues of morality were deemed sentimental.(11) Following the failure of the Second Republic in France, the triumphant grande bourgeoisie not only stamped out any feminist movement - Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland were imprisoned for six months in 1850 for forming worker associations after which Pauline Roland was deported to Algeria in 1851 and Jeanne Deroin went into exile - it ensured the submission of the working class by banning all trade union activity. Gender division was reinforced as a consequence of the granting of universal male suffrage in 1848. The net result was the separate development of feminism and socialism for the duration of the Second Empire if indeed development there was. In fact socialism developed in its scientific form outside France, and by the time it was reintroduced by Jules Guesde in the 1880s the tenuous links with feminism had changed. Certainly the most vociferous feminists of the 1860s onwards were from the bourgeois women who were interested in achieving equality within their own class. Flora Tristan's life and work did not find sympathisers among members of that class.

It was only when feminism began to make inroads into the socialist movement at the turn of the century that the name Flora Tristan became known and heard:



Ce n'est qu'un peu plus tard, c'est-à-dire à la génération des femmes nées entre 1880 et 1900 que l'on va redécouvrir et comprendre l'effort accompli par Flora et par ses contemporaines. L'intérêt pour la recherche en histoire des femmes le confirme. Ainsi de l'institutrice syndicaliste et internationaliste Hélène Brion qui consacra en 1919 à l'auteur de *L'Union ouvrière* une brochure au titre significatif: *Une méconnue, Flora Tristan la vraie fondatrice de l'Internationale.* (12)

With the development of "*le socialisme ouvrier*" and trade unionism and then late twentieth century feminism, with its attack on all forms of patriarchy, including a separate theory of oppression to that of capitalist oppression, the implications of Flora Tristan's output can be studied in a different light. Whereas earlier studies saw her work as a contribution to "*le socialisme ouvrier*" her image has now changed somewhat. No longer is she some obscure figure lurking in the past, a minor star in the history of socialism, but a major voice in nineteenth century radicalism.

The search for Flora Tristan's current image is not a question of suddenly discovering her sympathies overnight just because they are now in vogue. Contemporary sources indicate that she was well known as a singular woman undertaking public activity when she died:

« Douée d'une ardente imagination, d'une raison vigoureuse, d'une beauté remarquable et surtout d'un courage encore bien rare chez son sexe, madame Tristan a la gloire d'être la première femme qui, seule et sans le secours ou le conseil d'aucun homme, ait osé entreprendre une oeuvre publique et sociale. (13)

Only a few days dead, not yet buried, and a certain image was already forming. There is no mention here of the differences of opinion

between Flora Tristan and fellow militants, the lack of support from leading democrats, republicans, Saint-Simonians, Fourierists, or working men's associations (admittedly then in their infancy). In recognition of the personal sacrifice and effort Flora Tristan had made to alleviate the misery of the masses, differences were forgotten. In 1848 a monument was erected in her memory in Bordeaux cemetery and the occasion witnessed a gathering of thousands of workers.

However, the image established immediately following her death, that of one lone female attempting to unite a class, could not survive long without a movement to support it. The importance of her actions which aroused the admiration of the masses assembled in 1848 thus faded with the failure of the aspirations of the socialists who took part in the revolution of that year. Yet while Flora Tristan has been known as a feminist and a socialist since 1848, even though she faded temporarily from view because of the setbacks feminism and socialism received, once her image was revived it was placed in the new context of the burgeoning movements of feminism and socialism; any reinterpretation of her life and work has inevitably depended on whatever state the two ideologies were in at the time. For instance, it is interesting to note that in the 1920s bourgeois feminists extolled Flora Tristan as an exemplary female concurrently with the campaign for female suffrage.(14) Historians such as G.D.H. Cole also contributed to her revival when assessing the development of early socialism.(15)

There are two points to note in conclusion to part one. Firstly, the neglect of Flora Tristan was not simply a question of her almost

complete disappearance from the history books due to some misogynist plot to have women remain invisible. Secondly, neither is her resuscitation simply a question of reinserting the name of this lone female into the history books. Flora Tristan has undergone a more subtle change of identity due to the very nature of the development of feminism and socialism since her death. One individual does not make a movement, as Sheila Rowbotham argues.(16) Flora Tristan's image therefore could not have survived without the feminist movement. Furthermore, feminists are no longer satisfied with the image of one exceptional woman representing a whole ideal. In their search for their identity in the past, they are constantly seeking the expression of the collective identity: what is in common with others, not what is exceptional in one.(17)

Flora Tristan's life and work have assumed a new importance for her image as a feminist socialist because she is now part of a collective consciousness.

The attention she received in the late 1970s and early 1980s, culminating in an international conference at Dijon, in 1984, entitled *Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan*, would seem to indicate that her previous neglect has been fully rectified. The image of the forgotten feminist has now worn thin.

It is not the intention of this study to repeat the explanation of why Flora Tristan was forgotten only to be resuscitated. What I intend to examine are the assumptions underlying the studies of her life and

work in order to demonstrate the need for a further thesis: what exactly is her identity today as a result of nearly a century and a half of accumulated criticism and analysis? This question must be addressed before examining which aspects of her feminism and socialism are now considered important and relevant today.

## (2) FLORA TRISTAN'S BIOGRAPHICAL AND LITERARY IMAGES

### (a) The Biographical Image

There are three ways in which the personal circumstances of Flora Tristan have been interpreted:

- Her autobiographical works are taken literally to portray her as a victim.
- Her work is regarded as a distortion of the truth which makes the critic doubt some if not all of her work.
- Flora Tristan's work is neither truth nor fiction but the sum total of one woman's experience and her interpretation of it. Myth and reality are intertwined. Flora Tristan creates her own image.

To begin with, her life story is inextricably linked with her politics. This has meant much biographical emphasis on her output as a writer and activist. The obvious interpretation here is that Flora Tristan's personal circumstances drove her to feminism and socialism. Flora Tristan herself used the terms "pariah" and "apostle" to describe

her status. There is indeed the claim by Rabine that Flora Tristan created her own myth.(18)

The very title of her first work, *Pérégrinations d'une Paria*, gives an indication of the image Flora Tristan wanted for herself. The pariah during her lifetime becomes a heroine for posterity.

Of course it cannot be denied that Flora Tristan had an extraordinary life. This has been taken up in several ways. At what can only be described as a rather antagonistic level, she is treated purely as an eccentric, an example of an incurable romantic whose writing cannot therefore be taken seriously, with implied condemnation of her feminism and socialism. Rabine quotes such inimical commentators where her ideas are deliberately criticised as being harmful and wrong.(19) In this case either the critics are unsympathetic to the cause of the emancipation of women, as Maigron and Janin are, or, as in the case of George Sand, there is a personality clash between author and subject.(20) Very few antipathetic interpretations are in recent circulation; in fact Rabine's thesis is the only one I have come across which takes a delight in quoting them. The vast majority of those commentating on her do so with a certain amount of sympathy for the cause of feminism and socialism.

Too much sympathy can be a bad thing however. One admirer of Flora Tristan's went overboard in trying to preserve her image of a female messiah: two years after her death, Alphonse Constant published *L'Emancipation de la femme ou le testament de la paria*.(21) This work

is no longer regarded as written by Flora Tristan, if indeed it ever was, but this incident illustrates how one aspect, albeit a rather eccentric one, of Flora Tristan's work, is taken literally. The messianic vision of woman is exaggerated along with the religious connotations she referred to during the last few months of her life when she was already very ill and overworked. This is the most extreme distortion of Flora Tristan's image, and deservedly did not endure. The strength of her hatred for the established Church leaves one in no doubt as to her feelings about the power of catholicism in upholding the society based on property and greed.(22) Although reference to religion cannot be dismissed in Flora Tristan's work, it does not constitute a vital element of her thinking. This last mentioned work is the only one the very authenticity of which has been questioned.(23)

For those who take her autobiographical writings for the literal truth, her pitiful condition is turned to advantage. Not only do her circumstances make a good story, as in Charles Neilson Gattey's Gauguin's Astonishing Grandmother,(24) but they are used to demonstrate the oppression of women. Blanc, Brion and Goldsmith do so. The danger of this approach is the tendency in their case to distort her personal circumstances in order to stress the difficulties Flora Tristan had to overcome:

Flora Tristan l'éprouve une fois de plus: la femme mariée n'existe pas par elle-même, mais seulement en fonction de son seigneur et maître.(25)

The autobiographical content of *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* and *Néphis* is sometimes taken literally for another purpose. For some commentators her life is synonymous with her feminism.(26) Irrespective of what Flora Tristan actually wrote, the very fact that she was able to escape from the effects of illegitimacy, poverty and a disastrous marriage to become a writer, theorist and activist is held to be sufficient proof that she was a feminist.

To reach a balanced judgement of Flora Tristan's own versions of her life in *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* and *Néphis* is impossible, since there are no alternative sources to which one may refer. The accuracy of these autobiographical works is extremely dubious in places, as Puech is the first to admit. It has been well established by him that Flora Tristan practised self censorship; for instance there is no record of her years as an employee of the English aristocracy because Flora Tristan destroyed all the evidence. Puech attributes Flora Tristan's inclination to misrepresent as a female weakness and to compensate he believes we must give credence to her enemies. He is accused by Rabine of giving too much credence to Chazal's side of the story of the marriage breakdown which resulted in the latter's imprisonment, firstly on a charge of incest and for a second time when he unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Flora Tristan in 1838.

The purely biographical approach sees the individual first, and what her work represents second. Isolated from the bigger story of the evolution of feminism and socialism, the individual lifetime story, however unusual it may be, can only reaffirm the statement that women

have much lower expectations than men, and that any who achieve fame do so because of their eccentricities. Goldsmith in Seven Women against the World (27) believes that progress occurs because of the odd fanatical exception. What modern feminists are trying to do is to interpret Flora Tristan as an example of the collective female reaction to oppression.

A limited amount of interesting work has been done outlining Flora Tristan's experience as a militant during the last year of her life. Union Ouvrière was published in 1843 with further editions in 1844. Only since her unpublished diaries were rescued by Puech, edited by Collinet in 1973 and again by Michaud, have the commentators had access to Flora Tristan's notes on her four month tour of France, taking in Auxerre, Dijon, Roanne, Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Marseille, Toulon, Nîmes, Montpellier, Toulouse and Bordeaux. A campaign of one year was not long enough to have a lasting impact on the socialist movement. Maurice Aghulon has devoted a work to the munitions factory strike which took place shortly after her visit. (28) This is the only instance where her visit had any immediate and obvious effect.

Desanti's approach is to project an image of a sexual revolutionary by highlighting the romantic sublimated nature of Flora Tristan's erotic desires. At a time in the early 1970s when some liberation movements were pushing for greater freedom of sexuality, this image of a woman seeking to break beyond the boundaries of conventionality was pleasing to the ears of feminists. However, the reception of this image is more than a fashion or trend. What is at stake is firstly the personal freedom of women and secondly the expression of femaleness, the prise



*de conscience*. In feminism, as in many other radical ideologies, writing has become a central weapon with which to combat oppression, and this was the case for Flora Tristan. It is also the means with which to search for a personal/collective identity. Flora Tristan's idiosyncrasies have thus assumed a new significance. For instance, Rabine suggests there are several layers of meaning in *Pérégrinations d'une Paria*. Rabine writes:

Her role as author is not to relate her own deeds, nor even to act as narrator, but to synthesize story, narrator, and listener reaction, and to describe the new relation between author, character and audience that, as a woman writer, she is trying to construct. (29)

This aspect of Flora Tristan's image has only been fully developed in the 1970s.

One of the most interesting works using the biographical approach is Sandra Dijkstra's thesis.(30) Instead of praising the heroic attributes of Flora Tristan's supreme sacrifice to the cause of the oppressed, namely workers and women, and extolling her forbearance of her isolation as the "*femme guide de l'humanité*", the tables are turned by Dijkstra who insists that uniqueness and loneliness were cultivated by Flora Tristan. It suited her to be a pariah, since she could not tolerate other women. This is the explanation Dijkstra gives for the almost complete lack of solidarity with known contemporary feminists such as Anna Wheeler in London and Eugénie Niboyet and Pauline Roland in France. Dijkstra also suggests that Flora Tristan's authoritarian manner made it impossible for her to collaborate with already existing

leading groups of workers. She could not accept their criticisms of her plan Union Ouvrière. Dijkstra concludes that subconsciously Flora Tristan guaranteed the failure of her own project as she had set herself an impossible task. She views Flora Tristan's image in the light of the question of why her project failed.(31)

In contrast to this psycho-analytical approach suggesting that Flora Tristan's project was fatally impaired by a sort of death wish, Pope suggests that Flora Tristan's premature death was the chief cause of her failure. Had she lived, she could have influenced the course of direction of the 1848 revolution for the better, says Pope, since the feminists who took part in 1848 failed to have their demands taken seriously largely because Flora Tristan was not there to ask for the right things:

Had this been the case and had women developed an independent form of action based on an awareness of the specific nature of their own oppression, feminist consciousness might have managed to outlive the socialist climate which had originally encouraged its growth. As it was, without the influence of Flora, women chose to append their cause to that of male socialism, concentrating first and foremost on persuading these socialists of the importance of women's political rights and participation and largely neglecting the roots of women's oppression, that which operates on a personal level within such basic social structures as the home and family. (32)

Since this is impossible to prove it must remain a purely speculative interpretation of Flora Tristan's work.

## (b) The Literary Image

As the image of Flora Tristan, the heroine, has assumed a new importance for feminists, the literary image of Flora Tristan has been more frequently discussed.(33)

Flora Tristan's particular style of writing is in fact most admired in Promenades dans Londres and Pérégrinations d'une Paria but not in her novel Néphis. In his article 'Le talent littéraire de Flora Tristan', Lehouck considers Néphis to be the most mediocre of her works. Schéler condemns it as:

Lecture ingrate que celle de ce livre par la puerilité lassante des caractères de l'intrigue. (34)

Puech is a little more generous in his appraisal, suggesting that Néphis could have a place in French literature as an example of the romantic novel, while Rabine's thesis is that it is an attempt to go beyond the boundaries of romanticism.

As Lehouck and Planté make clear, Flora Tristan's intention in writing was not Art for Art's sake. She always had a practical aim in mind: to protest against social conditions whether it be slavery, lack of divorce possibilities, prostitution or the class system. If Union Ouvrière is discounted because it is not a literary piece, or Néphis because it is a badly written novel, that only leaves Promenades dans Londres, full of anglophobia, and Pérégrinations d'une Paria, mostly consisting of a distorted account about her circumstances. This is a

very slim foundation on which to base an image of Flora Tristan, the littératrice, were it not of course for the fact that she just happens to be a feminist and socialist.

Lehouck's conclusion would seem to suggest that were it not for her feminism and socialism, no one would notice her:

Ainsi, par son existence passionnée, par son importante action dans l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier, par son intelligence vigoureuse et anticonformiste, par son talent littéraire, Flora Tristan apparaît comme une personnalité exceptionnelle. (35)

The fact that she began her career as a writer and ended it as an ardent militant means that any attempt to analyse her writing must inevitably encompass her feminism and socialism.

The image of Flora Tristan the literary figure with a promising future, Rabine reckons, was cut short in mid-stream:

She did not live long enough to return to literary creativity. (36)

The work Promenades dans Londres has added a further dimension to Flora Tristan's career as a writer, in that this work falls into the category of sociology. Accompanying the growth of urbanisation, industrialism and the new forms of human misery engendered, was a new science: investigation into social conditions. Flora Tristan's observations at first hand of social conditions on both sides of the English Channel have earned her a place in the annals of the history of

sociology thanks to the work of two commentators, François Bédarida and Michelle Perrot.(37)

The conclusion to this section is that the literary interpretations are not sufficient to encompass all aspects of her work as there is insufficient material. Flora Tristan's literary works cannot be judged as such as they are simply not thought outstanding. Rabine makes the point that Flora Tristan began with the literal truth in Pérégrinations d'une Paria but passed on to the literary truth when she wrote her only novel Néphis.(38) As she was more interested in portraying the message than in the form of the message, she abandoned the literary truth for factual observation in Promenades dans Londres and then went on to proselytising in Union Ouvrière.

### (3) FLORA TRISTAN'S POLITICAL IMAGE

The persistence of Flora Tristan's image is in fact her identification with the feminist and socialist movement. This in my opinion is the most salient and the most controversial image: salient because her biographical and literary images to a large extent mirror her political image: controversial because of the vexed relationship between the two movements and because of Flora Tristan's fluctuating identification with one or the other. There are those who find Flora Tristan's socialism inadequate, such as the Marxists who dismiss her as too utopian; there are those who find the socialist neglect of the feminist input an oversight, such as feminist socialists like Moon; there

are those who find her feminist input inadequate, such as feminists like Moses.

(a) Utopian or Practical Socialist?

It has already been indicated in part one that her name was first associated with the beginnings of the socialist movement. In a sort of one-up-womanship, several commentators have stressed the fact that she had formulated her Union Ouvrière four years before Marx produced his Communist Manifesto.(39) Puech distinguished two forms of socialism, "*socialisme philosophique*" and "*socialisme ouvrier*",(40) and identified Flora Tristan with the latter. Thibert drew a similar distinction between the petit-bourgeois utopian socialists and the working class movements.(41) Whatever the distinction, the assertion made at the beginning of this century was that Flora Tristan was closer to the Marxist form of socialism than to the utopians'. Yet the Marxist declaimers who continue to assess the early socialist thinkers in the light of subsequent developments, insisting on the superiority of Marx, can only remark on her failure to analyse the workings of capitalism when in fact this very system was evolving rapidly even as she wrote:

... elle a acquis, au moment où elle tombe, une conscience nette de l'opposition irrémédiable des classes et est ainsi sans conteste le plus avancée des militants qui précèdent Marx.(42)

In other words, she is assessed at the beginning of the twentieth century for her contribution to the beginnings of the workers' self

emancipatory movements: praised as being advanced, yet criticised therefore much later in this century for being too limited. For an example of the latter, in Dijkstra we find criticism of her brand of socialism. Her socialism is inadequate in as much as it was utopian socialism:

Tristan was somewhat confused over the causes of the terrible conditions she witnessed. (43)

This critic quotes Engels to demonstrate how socialists of earlier times criticised the existing modes of production and their consequences, but could not get the mastery of them.

Being associated with the utopians means having their image, being associated with their "weaknesses": their belief that the bourgeoisie will lead the way in the construction of a better society and their hazy understanding of capitalism in their theories. However, as Thibert points out in her analysis, Flora Tristan was not interested in formulating a theory for its own sake. Her immediate and most pressing aim was to formulate a programme for action. Thibert stresses this point as an explanation for the fact that Flora Tristan borrowed heavily from her action-minded contemporaries such as Fourier, Saint-Simonian followers, Owen, O'Connell, the Chartists, and the various *Compagnons* and Associationists.

Flora Tristan's image as a socialist is also associated with the French socialist thinkers of the July Monarchy, like them attempting to put theory into practice.

It is not difficult to criticise Flora Tristan's attempt to fuse theory and action. She had assumed that the employers would tolerate the organisation of a new class, ready to assume their rights, and she had also supposed the workers were ready to act when the industrial working class was hardly established in France. These were naïve ideas though Armogathe suggests that her scheme of Union Ouvrière for forming associations on a class basis was a common idea at the time.(44) And Moon states perceptively that:

Tristan's "naïve" socialism is considered to contain two seeds of mature socialism: the self-emancipation of the working class and the workers' international.(45)

#### (b) Feminist Socialist?

The inherent weaknesses of a utopian socialist thinker may exist, but that is no reason to ignore the feminist input, claim the feminist socialists. Moon suggests that Flora Tristan's Socialistic Internationalism is vastly overrated and directs attention away from the important "need", the equality of women as the important step to social transformation. Those critics who neglect to include this vital aspect of Flora Tristan's theory are failing to present her true image.

While Thibert demonstrated that Flora Tristan's uniqueness in relation to other utopians is her synthesis of feminism and socialism into one cause, Moon went further in building her feminist socialist image by underlining how the preliminary decision of working men to



grant the principle of sexual equality is an integral part of this synthesis. Indeed the whole fabric depends on that:

By recognising the equality of workingwomen, the workingmen would open the door not only to feminism, but to socialism. (46)

Moon describes Flora Tristan's feminism within the socialist plan as radical, whereas the development of working class socialism contained a purely "domestic feminism", that is, equality within the home at the expense of economic independence. But even as she was preaching this, the skilled workers already had their women on a pedestal in the home, like their bourgeois sisters. A workers' association without working women was not only possible, since most societies excluded women and there were few female societies, but it was economically and morally preferable both from the employers' and the male workers' points of view.

Moon's interpretation is:

Tristan's socialism embodies a radical feminism that freed woman from the home and placed her on a competitive footing in the market place. (47)

There is a rather different interpretation of Flora Tristan's feminism from this one in Dijkstra and in Goldberg-Moses. Dijkstra accuses Flora Tristan of working for capitalism because she failed to provide an escape for women from the family:

In attempting to construct an ideal of the perfect family, Tristan was unwittingly working on behalf of the very

capitalist system which she recognized to be the cause of so much woe. (48)

The question of Flora Tristan's feminism and her socialism is thus complex. Her feminism in itself raises difficulties. Goldberg-Moses asserts that Flora Tristan's priorities changed in Union Ouvrière from feminism and women as a category of analysis to socialism and the working class. But her focus was never only on women. Her ideal for the working class was a harmonious family life which entailed a specific role for women. And on the nature of freedom of choice and on the question of separate spheres, Flora Tristan is decidedly hazy at times, illustrating the fact that her theories on feminism were not fully developed.

Adler objects to the way she feels repelled by the prostitutes' condition, rather than expressing complete solidarity in some way such as Suzanne Voilquin did by setting up a free midwifery service for them. (49)

Goldberg-Moses pinpoints a further weakness of Flora Tristan's feminism - the passive role she attributed to women in the future bid for emancipation:

The result of her shift in focus is at first jarring to those who examine L'Union Ouvrière in an attempt to trace Tristan's feminism. Although she sometimes self-consciously used both feminine and masculine gender forms to stress that when she spoke to the working class she spoke to *ouvrières* and *ouvriers*, more often she assumed that her working-class audience would be male. ... She devoted one entire chapter to 'the necessity for women's emancipation' but addressed it to male workers, arguing that they must liberate women. (50)

For feminists therefore, there is an ambiguity in the role of women in Flora Tristan's scheme. Although she demanded equal pay for equal work, and that women should have an equal position in the workforce and equal access to education, it is only by implication that it can be assumed that she wanted an end to the sexual division of labour and an end to separate spheres, two of the most glaring and enduring aspects of sexual inequality. The importance Flora Tristan attached to family life and to education may be explained by the fact that she valued what she had herself been deprived of. However she did place Woman as the central figure in the family. She believed that women had inherent natures which made them morally superior to men and eminently more qualified to be saviours of humanity. These are the questions which make the relationship between feminism and socialism a stormy one.

#### (4) CONCLUSION

My suggestion therefore is that the central feature of Flora Tristan's image is her contribution to feminism and socialism. In this lies her real identity. There are many dimensions to this image as a feminist socialist including Flora Tristan's experiences at the hands of the socialists of her day and of following generations, and her doctrinal vicissitudes on the issues of feminism, socialism and their relationship, mirroring the love/hate relationship between socialism and feminism in nineteenth century France and generally. By examining Flora Tristan's treatment by the critics and commentators I hope to have drawn attention to the many facets of her identity and to have shown

why this personality has been the subject of so much recent attention and controversy. In the succeeding chapters I will explain in more depth these facets in an attempt to unravel the complexity of this extraordinary person.

## Footnotes to Chapter One

- 1 Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Œuvre de Flora Tristan (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1925) *Avant Propos*, p.1
- 2 *M.L.F. - Mouvement de libération des femmes* - the popular name given by the press to feminists in France in the early 1970s, and later adopted by one particular radical feminist group.
- 3 For the proceedings to this conference, see Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, Actes du Premier Colloque International Flora Tristan (Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 1985) (listed under 'ACTES')
- 4 This is expounded by James McMillan, Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) p.80, and by Emile Lehouck, 'Le talent littéraire de Flora Tristan' in Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles, vol.6, 1963-1964, pp.376-91, among others.
- 5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956) p.30. This was the first joint work by Marx and Engels. At the end of August 1844 they met in Paris where Marx had been since early 1843. In this work they criticise socialist propositions put forward by their contemporaries in France and Germany; in particular they attack Edgar and Bruno Bauer, Hegelians, who had been critical of Flora Tristan. In part (1) of Chapter IV, entitled, Flora Tristan's Union Ouvrière Engels analyses and quotes E. Bauer's review of Flora Tristan's Union Ouvrière which was published in Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung in April 1844.
- 6 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1972) pp. 297-298. Sandra Dijkstra refers to the same instance in greater detail in Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego, 1976, pp.264-269
- 7 There seems to be some discrepancy over the name of this organisation: "Association fraternelle des institutrices socialistes" according to one source: see Marie-Hélène Zylberberg-Hocquard, Féminisme et Syndicalisme en France (Paris: Anthropos, 1978) p.82, but "Association fraternelle et solidaire de toutes les associations" according to Daniel Armogathe, 'Flora Tristan, féministe et socialiste' in Gisèle Halimi, Finis le féminisme? Compte rendu intégral du colloque international « Féminisme et socialismes » organisé par le mouvement « Choisir », le 13, 14 et 15 octobre 1983, au Palais de l'UNESCO à Paris (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) p.70
- 8 Daniel Armogathe, 'Flora Tristan, féministe et socialiste' in Finis le Féminisme?, pp.70-71

- 9 For an assessment of Fourier's feminism and the unacceptability of his ideas see Benoîte Groult, Le féminisme au masculin (Paris: Denoël Gonthier, 1977) pp.155-178
- 10 For evidence of this ridicule see illustrations and cartoons in contemporary newspapers, some of which are reproduced in Claire Goldberg-Moses, French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984)
- 11 In her study of the utopians in Britain, Eve and the New Jerusalem (London: Virago, 1983), Barbara Taylor gives a good account of the consequence of this rejection for the subsequent strained relationship between feminism and socialism.
- 12 Daniel Armogathe, 'Flora Tristan, féministe et socialiste', p.71
- 13 Funeral oration at graveside. Bordeaux November 1844. quoted in Eléonore Blanc, Biographie de Flora Tristan (Lyon: chez l'auteur, etc., 1845) pp.66-67
- 14 Anon. 'La Presse et le Féminisme', Minerva, 19 juillet 1936.
- 15 G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought (London: Macmillan, 1953) pp.183-188
- 16 Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) pp.11-12
- 17 A good example is Deborah Pope's thesis The Development of Feminist Consciousness and Women's Writing in France in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1980
- 18 See Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal: Women Writers of Mid Nineteenth Century France, Unpublished PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1973
- 19 Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal, pp.211-212 and p.307
- 20 George Sand (1804-1876) began writing successfully while Flora Tristan was in Peru, and quickly became well known in Paris. In her introduction to Pérégrinations d'une Paria ( pp.xxvj-xxvij 1838 edition), Flora Tristan praised her achievements as part of the then 10 year old movement of writers calling for the emancipation of women, but was critical of her use of men's attire and pseudonym. However this did not prevent her from soliciting help for Union Ouvrière to which George Sand subscribed. After Flora Tristan's death, George Sand was in her turn severe in her judgement of the way Flora Tristan had neglected her daughter, Aline. See Correspondance de George Sand, (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1969) Tome VI, 1843-juin 1845, pp.789-790
- 21 L'Emancipation de la femme ou le testament de la paria, ouvrage posthume de Mme Flora Tristan, complété d'après ses notes et publié

par A. Constant (Paris: au bureau de la direction de la vérité: Guarin, 1846)

- 22 Beverley Livingstone discusses some aspects of this question in her translator's introduction to Union Ouvrière, Flora Tristan, The Workers' Union (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983)
- 23 During her tour of France, Flora Tristan was challenged by some for masquerading as the author of Union Ouvrière. Incredulity was expressed that a woman should be capable of producing such a work. See Flora Tristan, Le Tour de France: état actuel de la classe ouvrière sous l'aspect moral, intellectuel et matériel, journal inédit de Flora Tristan, réédité par Michel Collinet, texte et notes établis par Jules-L. Puech, introduction nouvelle de Stéphane Michaud. (Paris: Maspéro, La Découverte, 1980)
- 24 Charles Neilson Gattey, Gauguin's Astonishing Grandmother: Flora Tristan (London: Femina, 1970)
- 25 Hélène Brion, Une méconnue: Flora Tristan, la vraie fondatrice de l'Internationale (Epône: L'Avenir Social, 1919), p.6
- 26 See Paule Lejeune, Flora Tristan: Réalisation Oeuvres (Paris: Collection 'Le peuple prend la parole', 1975), and Hélène Brion, Une méconnue
- 27 Margaret Goldsmith, Seven Women Against the World (London: Methuen, 1935) pp.67-90
- 28 Maurice Aghulon, Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique. Toulon de 1815 à 1851 (Paris et La Haye: Mouton et De Gruyter, 1970) pp.154-177. This work is quoted in a footnote in Daniel Armogathe et Jacques Grandjonc, 'L'Union Ouvrière de Flora Tristan: Internationalisme et Organisation de la Classe Ouvrière' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, p.250 (listed under 'ACTES')
- 29 Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal, p.240
- 30 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change
- 31 While it analyses Flora Tristan's actions in relation to herself, this work is nonetheless a very scholarly contribution to Flora Tristan's image as a feminist and socialist. It contains, for instance, a close comparison of Flora Tristan's Promenades dans Londres with Frederick Engels' The Conditions of the Working Class in England (London: Panther, 1979)
- 32 Deborah Pope, The Development of Feminist Consciousness, p.354
- 33 See Christine Planté, 'Flora Tristan, écrivain méconnu?' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, pp.186-198, and Lucette Czyba, 'Flora Tristan: de la révolte à l'apostolat du « Tour de France »' in La Femme au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (Lyon: P.U.L., 1978) pp.29-54

- 34 Lucien Schéler Flora Tristan: Morceaux Choisis précédés par 'La geste romantique de Flora Tristan' (Paris: La Bibliothèque Française, 1947) p.28
- 35 Emile Lehouck, 'Le talent littéraire de Flora Tristan', p.391
- 36 Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal, p.309
- 37 See François Bédarida's introduction to his re-edition of Promenades dans Londres (Paris: Maspéro, 1976)
- 38 Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal, p.246
- 39 See Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, Hélène Brion, Une méconnue, and G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (London: Macmillan, 1965)
- 40 Jules-L. Puech, 'Flora Tristan et le Saint-Simonisme', brochure (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1925). In this work, Puech blames Marx for his preoccupations with Proudhon for omitting his acknowledgement to Flora Tristan.
- 41 Marguerite Thibert, 'Féminisme et Socialisme d'après Flora Tristan' in Revue d'histoire économique et sociale, Paris, 1921, pp.115-136
- 42 Michel Lequenne, 'Flora Tristan' in Rouge, no.974 (du 19 au 25 juin 1981), pp.22-23
- 43 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.325
- 44 See Daniel Armogathe et Jacques Grandjonc, 'L'Union Ouvrière de Flora Tristan', pp.116-117
- 45 S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: the Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan' in Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, editors, European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (New York: Elsevier, 1978) pp.19-50 (p.39)
- 46 S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', p.41
- 47 S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', p.45
- 48 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.326
- 49 Laure Adler, 'Flora, Pauline et les autres' in Jean-Pierre Aron, Misérable et glorieuse, la femme au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Fayard, 1980) pp.191-211 (p.194)



- 50 Claire Goldberg-Moses, French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, pp.108-109

## Chapter Two

### PEREGRINATIONS D'UNE PARIA AND EARLY WORKS: FEMINISM AND EGALITARIANISM

#### (1) ORIGINS OF FEMINISM

Before beginning the analysis of Flora Tristan's first works it is important to establish the extent to which feminism had developed in France at the time.

As Rendall indicates, the term feminism for this period is anachronistic but is nevertheless an indispensable tool for analysis.(1) It is acknowledged that there was no one feminist movement; throughout the nineteenth century for instance, Rendall observes that there were at least two kinds of feminist movement, one of which can be distinguished by the term woman's rights, in the sense of civil and political equality, and the other by woman's emancipation, which has a broader and more radical sense of striving for freedom from oppressive restrictions imposed by sex, and for self determination and autonomy. The same author suggests that feminism did not always mean equality and sameness of economic and civil roles between men and women, but that before scientific socialism, equality in the feminist sense was interpreted in

terms of moral and rational worth. This interpretation highlights a glaring ambiguity of early feminism. Recognising oppression was one thing, but determining the cause and eliminating it were open to debate. It was almost straightforward to state that the structure of society favoured one gender, but when it came to deciding how to end this oppression the issue of whether women should or wanted to have equal status in society both within and outside the home provoked furious debate about the very nature of womanhood. For Mary Wollstonecraft,(2) for instance, virtue was sexless; women, as rational human beings, had as much potential as men. This left the question of motherhood in the air. As we shall see, Flora Tristan was to discover the ambiguity of this question. The issues raised in her early works contribute to this debate.

Flora Tristan was not the first person in France to talk of women's rights. Olympe de Gouges, author of Déclaration des droits de la femme 1791, is an earlier example of a tireless campaigner and pamphleteer. Likewise, Condorcet was an ardent feminist, demanding equality of opportunity through education. There is no doubt that the Enlightenment and the initial revolutionary atmosphere made an impact on feminism, though attempts made to associate the origins of feminism with republicanism have run into troubled waters. Olympe de Gouges, although a keen feminist and abolitionist, was in fact an ardent royalist.(3) One might jump to the conclusion that the revolution encouraged an atmosphere of liberty for women. But quite the reverse is true:

The language of natural rights and republicanism did provide a vocabulary and a means of rousing women's political interests and, perhaps, might be applied and

extended to their own situation. Yet the role for women which came to be seen as their best service to the republic, that of motherhood, while recognised as valuable and patriotic, was still essentially private and domestic. (4)

What women gained from the revolution in terms of rights - equal inheritance for instance was the only thing which outlasted the revolutionary period - was annihilated by the imposition of the Napoleonic Code, which confined the role of women to domesticity. In the early nineteenth century therefore, this domestic status was ascribed to women as a natural function, and it was this status that nineteenth century women were to challenge. Organisation on a collective basis was impossible at this stage. Vociferous complaints about gender oppression came from a minority among intellectuals and the middle classes. Women either refused to accept this role in the way Flora Tristan escaped, in which case they became pariahs, or else they sought new feminist meaning to their ascribed role. For this reason a further ambiguity of early feminism was on this question of domesticity. For some feminists:

The domestic sphere was no longer to be merely the backcloth to public and social life, but to have a positive educational and inspirational function. (5)

The striving for equality within marriage was considered to be adequate in this case. For some, as long as a woman's position was not simply that of a passive partner, her female nature would, in the right conditions, regenerate the spirit of society. As Flora Tristan was to discover there were limitations to this approach. Women such as Madame

de Stäel and George Sand, were able to flaunt convention because of their privileged class position; unlike Flora Tristan they had a certain degree of independence, unlike her they restricted their demands to the domestic sphere.

Feminism did not however start with this kind of weak demand and gradually move on to more radical statements. From its very inception it was a movement for radical emancipation beyond the sphere of sexuality. For example, to return to the example of Olympe de Gouges, feminists were often associated with other causes of emancipation; even under the *Ancien Régime* she championed the cause of slavery and its abolition at a time when the colonial trading lobby was very powerful in France. Significantly enough, parallel to the fate of women's emancipation, slavery, abolished by the republic in 1794, was restored by the bourgeoisie under Napoleon.

Feminism was also a movement which claimed to be utilitarian. Therefore the notion that women were simply interested in improving their position, independent of the surrounding circumstances, is a false one but in the history of the feminist movement, links with circumstances are often played down or ignored. This is to forget that it is these very circumstances which determine the development of feminism. For instance it is important to remember, as Rendall states, that:

... the only model available to women to state their public demands was the political language of men. (6)

Like Flora Tristan, Olympe de Gouges is chiefly remembered as a feminist, whereas she was a feminist who was active in other spheres. As we shall see in Pérégrinations d'une Paria, Flora Tristan wrote about many other topics besides the oppression of women. This does not dilute her feminism. On the contrary, her analysis of female oppression is part of an analysis of all types of oppression in society. To talk of only the feminist aspects of Pérégrinations d'une Paria would be to ignore the major part of her book. In her overall thought process she found a way of expressing her feminism, but it was never the sole means of action, nor was it an end in itself.

To sum up the female political experience before Flora Tristan's day, one can recognise that the scope for militancy and success was limited. On an individual basis there were those who wrote pamphlets such as Olympe de Gouges or Mary Wollstonecraft. True, there was mass action at some stage; during the revolutionary period in France the mass of women from the lower orders were deeply affected by economic hardship and often intervened in the political process on a spontaneous basis. Groups of articulate women formed Clubs. Writings from individuals however were the most likely to survive. Spontaneous actions were not recorded apart from famous incidents such as the Parisian women's march to Versailles. Unless they issued from registered Clubs or expressed themselves in political action, feminist activities were not recorded. With the restoration of the Monarchy, the only means of public intervention left to women was that of writing.(7) As we shall see, Flora Tristan was to capitalise on this.

## (2) SELF-DISCOVERY IN PERU

The first part of this chapter contains an introduction to Flora Tristan's initiation as a writer and activist. The early part of her career was dominated by personal tribulations, and the subsequent trip to Peru seemed to form a cataclysm in Flora Tristan's career. We shall therefore begin with a discussion of Les Pérégrinations d'une Paria, a travel diary where Flora Tristan recorded her growing awareness of sexual and class inequality.

Les Pérégrinations d'une Paria, as the title would imply, is a highly personalised account of a woman who, because she rebelled against her condition of being unhappily married and because she was illegitimate, was a "pariah" according to the values of her day: a pariah because she had rejected the role of wife and mother; since divorce was impossible she did the next best thing by reassuming her family name of Tristan and by posing as a mademoiselle. She was acutely conscious therefore of the impediments of her position as a woman. To compensate for the disadvantages of her sex she was at even greater pains to seek recognition from her wealthy aristocratic family and thus to seek comfort in the material advantages of the aristocracy, an end to impoverishment which for a woman outside the wealthy classes, with three children to support, was well nigh impossible. We need only recall that once Flora Tristan left her husband she was never to live a "family life" with her children; they had to be looked after by others while she worked to support them.

Travelling to Peru, therefore, was part of Flora Tristan's desire for a solution to end her personal tribulations, and in itself was not intended as a particularly feminist or socialist action. The experience, however, taught her many things about herself and kindled an ambition to act on behalf of others.

Thus we may suppose that when she set out for Peru, she wished to leave behind her status of pariah and become fully integrated with the aristocracy in Peru and to lead a privileged existence either there or in France:

Cette reconnaissance sociale à laquelle aspire Flora Tristan est double : d'abord la simple légitimation de sa naissance, mais de plus la reconnaissance de son appartenance à une famille aristocratique illustre. (8)

As we shall see, the outcome was very different. Firstly, despite her desire for integration in the Tristan family, her trip led her to class awareness and reversed her class aspirations. Secondly, her pose as a mademoiselle taught her much about the inferior conditions of women.

In the first instance, while the story unfolds of her reception in Aréquipa, criticisms are made of the aristocracy as a corrupt class. From the outset there is thus a potential source of contradiction of class loyalties. Although desperate for the affection of her newly discovered relatives, as an egalitarian and indeed as a French woman, a foreigner, in Peru, she found the corruption of the Tristan family repellent and Peruvian society rotten in its fabric. Events were beyond her control, however. Any potential conflict of loyalties was resolved



when her uncle dismissed her claim to inheritance. Henceforth, the pariah, once more rejected, felt no constraint in formulating her critique of the aristocracy.

In the second instance, as a mademoiselle in Peru, Flora Tristan constantly juxtaposed the position of an impoverished but beautiful single woman with her previous experience as an unhappily married woman. Therefore the diary simultaneously presents several aspects of women's oppression. The meeting, face to face, with a large extended family, where women played extremely minor roles, but which she had dreamed about since her childhood, only to be rejected, the awareness of dual national cultures, and the humiliation of this knowledge of the limitations of her false position serve to highlight the discovery of injustice in class differences and in sexual inequality.

We can say, therefore, that through her personal sufferings of an inescapable marriage and the dashing of her hopes for inherited wealth, Flora Tristan began to identify with larger groups of oppressed people. She became motivated to want to achieve change, although she was not quite sure what form this action should take when she was in Aréquipa. An immediate outlet was to be found in her interest and participation in public life in Peru. As long as she remained a guest, she was an honorary member of the illustrious Tristan family whose men played a central role in the struggle for power in Peruvian public affairs. As such Flora Tristan was able to take advantage of her new-found role of *conseillère* to the military and political personalities she was to encounter. In this way she was to witness the workings of power.

Indeed we can say that her position as an outcast was reversed in her own eyes when she rejected the values of society in Pérégrinations d'une Paria. The tables were turned. Illegitimate, she attacked the values of property, marriage and greed which had defined her as illegitimate. A woman, she attacked the values of male supremacy which caused her inferiority. She thus redeemed herself in her own eyes by identifying with the oppressed. In conjunction with this discovery of class and sex inequality came the discovery of her own potential by participating enthusiastically in discussions on public affairs and visiting social institutions and public places as a social observer, "une enquêtrice sur place". Subsequently, she began to write freely, recording her experiences in a diary. It was a very short step, as we shall see in parts two and three of this chapter, to writing to campaign for change. Finally, in formulating Pérégrinations d'une Paria Flora Tristan made public her own situation because she realised she had something in common with other women:

Beaucoup de femmes vivent séparées de fait d'avec leurs maris ... Ce n'est donc pas *sur moi personnellement* que j'ai voulu attirer l'attention, mais bien sur toutes les femmes qui se trouvent dans la même position, et dont le nombre augmente journellement.  
Pérégrinations d'une Paria 1838 edition p.xxix

In so doing she took the only positive step available to women at the time to assert a "feminist" position.

### (3) DISCOVERY OF INEQUALITY

As we have stated, because of her awareness of the constraints on her own life, Flora Tristan was keen to observe how these operated on a social level. She therefore began to undertake a study of the various institutions which oppressed women: the family, the Church and the State. The discovery she made was the extent to which these institutions ensured and maintained women's position of servitude mainly through the bonds of marriage. Of this of course, she had first hand experience. Dijkstra makes the point that Flora Tristan's ambiguous marital status, married but separated, was ironic, but it afforded her a rare vantage point for viewing the institution of marriage:

As a married woman, [Flora] Tristan knew that statistics were insufficient to describe the real sufferings of women; therefore, she was determined to lift the veil of privacy which covered the reality of married life. (9)

For the reasons outlined, Flora Tristan's analysis stems from the intention of publicising and condemning actual sexual oppression, rather than from a proclamation of an abstract principle of sexual equality, although this was soon to follow. Flora Tristan's chief preoccupation at this stage was society's tolerance of the double standard of morality in marriage and the unequal legal relationship between men and women. She wanted to break the silent refusal to acknowledge the unhappiness caused by the two different codes of behaviour:

Si l'on réfléchit au grand nombre d'iniquités qui se commettent chaque jour, et que les lois ne sauraient atteindre, on se convaincra de l'immense amélioration dans les mœurs qui résulterait de la publicité donnée aux actions privées. Il n'y aurait plus alors d'hypocrisie possible, et la déloyauté, la perfidie, la trahison n'usurperaient pas sans cesse, par des dehors

trompeurs, la recompense de la vertu ... Pérégrinations d'une Paria 1838 edition p.xxxij

What is interesting, however, is that from the outset, oppression of women is seen within the widest possible context. The Peruvian experience ensures the context is even stretched across two continents. As is obvious from the preface, the travel tale Pérégrinations d'une Paria was intended as a revelation of all forms of the abuse of power; a study of married life from the side of the oppressed is one of these forms:

J'ai dit, après l'avoir reconnu, qu'au Pérou, la haute classe est profondément corrompue, que son égoïsme la porte, pour satisfaire sa cupidité, son amour du pouvoir et ses autres passions, aux tentatives les plus anti-sociales ; j'ai dit aussi que l'abrutissement du peuple est extrême dans toutes les races dont il se compose. Pérégrinations d'une Paria 1838 edition p.vij

Liberty is interpreted not in terms of the free will of the individual, but in terms of a lack of constraints. The groups which Flora Tristan mentioned, slaves, sailors and married women, were oppressed because they were deprived of liberty. Their oppression was as a result of being economically dependent on their masters, employers or husbands:

Tout être privé de fortune dépend d'autrui, est esclave, et doit vivre où son maître l'attache. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.138

Flora Tristan therefore began to see the link between the principle of freedom and the economic reality which denied this freedom both to the individual and the group, whether the latter be class, race or gender.

Flora Tristan gives examples of particular individuals such as her cousin Carmen, of people imprisoned by social conventions. In the development of this discourse, Carmen serves as a sounding board for Flora Tristan whereby her growing awareness of the nature of freedom finds expression:

... la liberté n'existe réellement que dans la *volonté*.  
Ceux qui ont reçu de Dieu cette volonté forte qui fait  
surmonter tout obstacle sont libres ; tandis que ceux  
dont le faible vouloir se lasse ou cède devant les  
contrariétés sont esclaves, et le seraient lors même  
que la bizarre fortune les placerait sur le trône.  
Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.139

In contrast to this naivety and optimism expressed by Flora Tristan, the book is the account of how she was exposed to circumstances in Peru which were to cause her to modify such views. On the one hand she acted with great determination and ability to rise above constraints, on the other hand her political discovery was that society was the cause of the oppression of thousands like her. Freedom was being systematically denied on a group level:

Les femmes, ici, pensais-je, sont donc, par le mariage,  
aussi malheureuses qu'en France; elles rencontrent  
également l'oppression dans ce lien et l'intelligence  
dont Dieu les a douées reste inerte et sterile.  
Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.141

As her narrative develops, it becomes obvious that Flora Tristan no longer believed her earlier optimistic statements on freedom declared in conversations on board ship, any more than she accepted government to be inherently good and responsible. Her trip to Peru was thus a revelation in more ways than one. The account is not detailed enough for us to be able to ascertain how and why Flora Tristan changed her opinions, but the narrative effect is striking. By assuming a certain degree of naïvety, she translated her political discovery into an education for her reader. It has been suggested that this naïvety makes more sense if it is interpreted as a didactic pose:

Ironically, of course, Flora had endured the very difficulties Carmen described, with the exception of domination by a patriarchal family, and the reader's awareness of Flora Tristan's real position increases the dramatic tension of the scene. (10)

The initial discussions with her fellow passengers during her voyage from France on abstract themes such as human nature, love and friendship become more concrete on land. There is thus a symbolic importance to be attached to the four month voyage. In transit, she had adopted a rather detached pose reporting the discussions among the men as though she did not know anything about the subject of politics:

M. Chabrié entrainait alors dans un grand détail sur l'organisation de sa république ; mais, comme je ne suis pas publiciste, j'avoue que je prêtais peu d'attention à cette partie de sa conversation.  
*Pérégrinations d'une Paria* 1838 edition pp.137-138

Her claim to be a mere ignorant bystander was not of course convincing, as she was well able to clarify the political differences between a

republican, a Bonapartist and a monarchist. And certainly the pose of disinterest vanishes once she arrived in Peru. On land she was able to launch immediately into an analysis of Peruvian society and show an astute awareness of colonialism.

What Flora Tristan was able to learn from her insight into the workings of society from above, as an honorary member of one of the most powerful families of Peru, was not just the corruption of the upper classes, but an ability to look for and state the causes of corruption and oppression. For instance, after stating her revulsion for the sacred plays and religious processions she writes:

La religion catholique dans les temps de la plus profonde ignorance, n'a jamais exposé au grand jour d'aussi indécentes bouffonneries, des parades plus scandaleusement impies. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.142

Flora Tristan tried to pinpoint the function of such events which attracted huge crowds. She could only see it as an indication of the hold the Church had over the masses:

Autant que je pus le voir je fus la seule qui revins tout attristée de ce spectacle. Je me suis toujours vivement intéressée au bien-être des sociétés au milieu desquelles le destin m'a transportée et je ressentais un vrai chagrin de l'abrutissement de ce peuple. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.146

Again we can see the contrast between her naïvety in earlier considerations of patriotism and religion with her sophisticated awareness of the corruption of power witnessed here:

Ce pays, déchiré par vingt ans de guerres civiles, est dans un état déplorable, et l'on cherche vainement, dans la classe qui, par sa fortune, occupe le premier rang, l'espoir d'un meilleur avenir ... Le vrai patriotisme, le dévouement n'existent nulle part ... Pégrinations d'une Paria p.147

The happiness of the people, she realised, was not foremost in the minds of those in power:

Son bonheur, me disais-je, n'est jamais entré pour rien dans les combinaisons des gouvernants. Pérégrinations d'une Paria pp.146-147

The link between the abuse of power and the Church is clearly stated:

... comme le pouvoir, et non la liberté, est le but de cette foule d'intriguants qui se succèdent à la direction des affaires, ils continuent l'oeuvre du despotisme, et, pour s'assurer de l'obéissance du peuple qu'ils exploitent, ils s'associent aux prêtres pour le maintenir dans tous les préjugés de la superstition. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.147

Flora Tristan was persuaded that Peruvian society was backward and corrupt because of the weakness of colonialism. Class differences were based on race:

Au Pérou, comme dans toute l'Amérique, l'origine européenne est le grand titre de noblesse ; dans le langage aristocratique du pays, on appelle blancs ceux dont aucun des ascendants n'est Indien ou Nègre ... Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.167

She was conscious of the discrepancies between the old world and the new, and, despite previous assertions of political innocence, was able to speak with some authority about the problems of Peru such as the system



of slavery, together with the absence of civilising factors such as true patriotism, hard work, education, accumulation of wealth and ability to spend, a strong leader and cultural and educational facilities.

There were two basic premises on which she based her judgement of Peruvian society, premises she was never to abandon even after her return to Europe.

The first premise is that she was convinced of the superiority of European society thanks to the benefits of hard work and progressive political ideas such as equality. She attributed the lack of civilisation and progress in Peru to the absence of equality, and compared it to post revolutionary North America:

... dans l'Amérique anglaise, les mœurs et usages s'étaient formés sous l'empire d'idées libérales, politiques et religieuses; les populations y étaient rapprochées, elles habitaient sous un climat qui donne de nombreux besoins, avaient conservé les habitudes laborieuses de l'Europe, et la richesse n'y étant acquise que par la culture des terres ou le commerce régulier, il y avait assez d'égalité dans sa distribution. *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* pp.219-220

This was to recognise the importance of the economic development of society by the bourgeoisie; indeed she developed her economic analysis further when she advised one leading politician of the need to stimulate the economy by encouraging all sections of the population to what is known in twentieth century terms as consumerism:

... l'époque d'établir des manufactures n'est pas encore arrivée pour vous : avant d'y songer, il faut d'abord faire naître dans la population le goût du luxe et des comforts de la vie, lui créer des besoins afin

de la porter au travail ... Tant que l'Indien ira pieds nus, se contentera d'une peau de mouton pour tout vêtement, d'un peu de maïs et de quelques bananes pour sa nourriture, il ne travaillera point. Pérégrinations d'une Paria pp.295-296

The second premise is her conviction of the need for education, good transport communications and free trade:

Instruisez le peuple, établissez des communications faciles, laissez le commerce sans entraves, et vous verrez alors la prospérité publique marcher à pas de géant. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.296

Economic prosperity was depicted as the means both to eliminate suffering and as an advance of civilisation. It was much later in her contacts with the working class that she was to understand that the economic benefits of capitalist prosperity were for one class alone. In the early stages of her career, she was an optimistic egalitarian, convinced that changes in the economy would be equally distributed without really giving much thought as to how this could be achieved. This analysis was very much part of the egalitarian inheritance. Freedom to develop the economy had been one of the prime motivators of the bourgeoisie in its support for revolutionary change in America and France. Egalitarianism meant the end of privilege, the opening up of new opportunities for the creation of wealth through commerce and industry.

What Flora Tristan understood by egalitarianism was of a limited kind. It is clear from Pérégrinations d'une Paria that she very likely believed at the time of writing that progress granted every class a

specific economic and social role, which was not necessarily an equal one. This can be illustrated by her view of the colonial system; Flora Tristan believed the process of gradual transfer of capital from agriculture and mining to commerce and industry was for the best, and that Peru was lacking in its basic infrastructure because there was no large core of hardworking bourgeoisie. The new and fast acquisition of democracy through the end of the links with Spain meant a corrupt use of power and money, squandered by the aristocracy in civil wars or else hoarded, thus preventing the circulation of capital. The country as a whole suffered. Clearly, Flora Tristan expected the ruling classes to have privileges of wealth but she also expected them to use their power "responsibly" and behave as loyal citizens towards their country. But patriotism did not always tie in with economic interests.

Until she developed a critique of capitalism, Flora Tristan's perception of Peruvian backwardness was to see the remedy in hard work and a development of good citizenship by the ruling class:

Arrivera enfin le jour fixé par la Providence où ces  
peuples seront unis sous la bannière du travail.  
Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.204

Although she claimed to have only a limited perception of public matters, Flora Tristan wrote Pérégrinations d'une Paria because the discovery of this corruption of economic and social power during her study of the institutions of Peru enlarged her horizons. She returned to France with a heightened awareness of the nature of the whole fabric of society; political, cultural, economic and social threads were clearly

interwoven. There is a progression from the innocent who asks questions on the voyage to Peru to one who provides the answers to those in political turmoil in Aréquipa. Here it is vital to stress that this process of politicisation was part of Flora Tristan's feminist assertion. In searching for a solution to her own predicaments she became embroiled in this whole social fabric:

... her examination became more systematic, for she realized that her own destiny depended on her appraisal of the options available to women. (11)

It must be stated that *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* was a view of society from above, in class terms, for however much she might despise that class, as a white intellectual European, Flora Tristan was one of that category. And although in gender terms class boundaries are crossed, yet class privilege seemed to reinforce sexual oppression. She was appalled by the constraints placed upon wealthy women despite the appearance of beauty, dazzling jewels and exotic costumes:

... presque toutes, mariées très jeunes, ont eu leurs facultés flétries, altérées par l'oppression plus ou moins forte que leurs maîtres ont fait peser sur elles.  
*Pérégrinations d'une Paria* p.140

With a specific oppression in mind - that exercised over women - it would appear that Flora Tristan was discovering a new way of seeing class divisions in society. She outlined many examples - the contrasting conditions of nuns in two convents, one wealthy and one poor and austere. In each case their potential was wasted; there was no outlet for their talents. In describing the convents there is a familiar

pattern of contrast between Flora Tristan's naïve belief in what they aspired to, and what she actually witnessed. Instead of finding in them a haven of spiritual peace, she described them as a place of imprisonment where blatant class hierarchy ruled:

Je ne crois pas qu'il ait jamais existé, dans l'Etat le plus monarchique, une aristocratie plus hautaine et plus choquante dans ses distinctions que celle dont le spectacle me frappa d'étonnement en entrant à Santa-Rosa. Là règnent, dans toute leur puissance, les hiérarchies de la naissance, des titres, des couleurs de la peau et des fortunes ... *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* p.243

In secular society, Flora Tristan contrasted the position of the wealthy Lima women with that of the Ravanas, the Indian women who incorporated traditional masculine and feminine roles. The Ravanas serviced the needs of Peruvian soldiers in many ways - carried arms and provisions, reconnoitred, sewed, washed, cooked, nursed children, acquired food by hunting or stealing. By describing their tasks, Flora Tristan was expressing her amazement at their ability to survive this hard life. Their survival did not depend on men but on their own courage and physical strength. Here she found proof that women were potentially equal or even superior to men, an argument to dispel the idea of fragility of women on which the upper class European women based their life style. In later works, Flora Tristan used the example of working class women's drudgery as a contrast with the idle boredom of wealthy women. For the moment, however, here was an example in primitive society:

Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse citer une preuve plus frappante de la supériorité de la femme, dans l'enfance des peuples ; n'en serait-il pas de même aussi chez

ceux plus avancés en civilisation, si une éducation semblable était donnée aux deux sexes ? Il faut espérer que le temps viendra où l'expérience en sera tentée. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.233

The wealthy Lima women were from the Peruvian upper classes, who seemed to enjoy much greater freedom than their European counterparts. Flora Tristan noted that this freedom was rather transitory, depending on beauty and dress, exactly the plight of French women, although she did not remark on this:

Si jamais elles abandonnaient ce costume sans prendre des mœurs nouvelles, si elles ne remplaçaient pas les moyens de séduction que leur fournit ce déguisement, par l'acquisition des talents ... elles perdraient immédiatement tout leur empire ... Pérégrinations d'une Paria pp.335-336

This section in fact contains a notion which was to be developed in Néphis, the idea that women had the capacity to develop their intelligence in a form which could be a source of inspiration to men. Here was a feminism in the sense of equality of moral worth. In fact, Flora Tristan went further than equality and talked of female superiority:

... la femme a sur l'homme une supériorité incontestable ... Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.335

This superiority however did not develop naturally:

... mais il faut qu'elle cultive son intelligence et surtout se rendre maîtresse d'elle-même pour conserver cette supériorité. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.335

Women must educate themselves if they were to obtain real power:

... au lieu d'être le guide, le génie inspirateur de l'homme ... elle ne cherche qu'à le séduire, qu'à régner sur ses sens, son empire s'évanouit avec les désirs qu'elle a fait naître. Pérégrinations d'une Paria p.335

Flora Tristan was also struck by the actions of individual women. Before she left Peru, she had opportunities to describe women whose courage and strength encouraged her to believe that for a woman, a nonconformist existence was often the only way of being free, of controlling her destiny. What is apparent in her accounts is that she judged particular women by their ability to control their own lives. This gave support to her ideas, strengthened her own self esteem and resolve as well as proving that other women were not prepared to accept their predetermined roles. Characters like Dominga-Gatinez, a distant cousin, whose bravery and cunning resulted in a daring escape from a prison-like convent, and who paid for her freedom with social ostracism, are depicted in a sympathetic manner.

Flora Tristan's observations about nuns, the women of Lima, and Dominga-Gatinez, were determined by her judgement of their abilities to bend or break the rules of the society which she had come to believe oppressed women. She paid particular attention to *la Presidente* Gamarra, a Peruvian woman general and political leader. We have the impression that Flora Tristan herself seriously considered trying to gain experience of ruling a country in the only way that was possible for a woman - through a liaison with a politician: in Gamarra's case,

the politician was her husband. There are frequent references to this exceptional character during the civil war, which Flora Tristan witnessed, but her meeting with Gamarra is dramatically timed to coincide with the end of her visit to Peru and after the political downfall of Gamarra. From what Flora Tristan reported, Gamarra was a despotic ruler, but there is little criticism of this style of leadership. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that it was Gamarra's "feminine" qualities which inspired her following. Indeed, it was Gamarra's use of "masculine" qualities which explained her success. And this fact leads Flora Tristan to an important truth - namely that there is no advantage for women to try to assume men's qualities, as they find themselves denying their femininity in order to maintain power. And Gamarra's downfall is a reminder to Flora Tristan how fleeting glory and happiness and indeed effectiveness as a ruler are. Nevertheless, she is a central example to demonstrate the universality of women striving to break from their social mould and to prove women's equal potential. Gamarra is the finest example Flora Tristan had met until then of women playing a leading role in society, although there is no suggestion that in such a position women could further their own cause and liberate themselves and their oppressors.

What Flora Tristan failed to develop in her critique in this work, or indeed in her entire lifetime, was a vision of how women as a collective force could act to achieve their liberation. Within the constraints of her experience in Peru, Flora Tristan did present the essence of the idea of Woman being the inspiration for change, an idea she was to develop much more fully in her novel *Néphis*. In this



respect, she came close to saying that women could provide the resources necessary for their own liberation, although they did need to rely on the reforming initiative of men. This notion will be examined in the next chapter. In the meantime there is a further element of her early work which must be considered.

The Peruvian experience gave Flora Tristan the insight into understanding the nature of women's difficulties. She identified with women either oppressed by economic hardships or by the legal system - which upheld not only the superior position of men in marriage, politics and society, but also the double standard of morality where men could act as they chose within and without the home, before and after marriage, but not so women. Further to her perception of oppression, she concluded that the aristocracy was corrupt in its exercise of both wealth and power and that the Church played a powerful role in maintaining the ignorance and oppression of the masses. Poverty and aristocracy, marriage and independence, repression and rebellion, the interests of the individual in opposition to the good of society, these then are the contrasting ideas inherent in Flora Tristan's scrutiny of Peruvian society which she transferred to modern society at large.

On her return to France, Flora Tristan began her active political career by trying to change women's conditions within the legality of the system, a system where the only legal form of political action open to women was to present petitions and have their work published.

#### (4) CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS IN FRANCE

In the previous section it has been shown that writing was the most important form of action for those demanding emancipation. Indeed the 1830s and 1840s in France was a period of tremendous output of works both by feminists and socialists, ranging from the collective effort to the individual work, from newspaper to novel. Some newspapers were very short lived, due to a lack of funds and strict censorship. The main galvanising force seems to have been the Saint-Simonian movement as it provided the necessary forum for discussions. Fourier too had disciples, organised by Considérant, who met regularly and published, although fewer in number than those attracted to Saint Simon's great disciple, Enfantin. Women were attracted to Saint-Simonian meetings in large numbers. As a result, feminism was given a great boost; needless to say many women carried their demands much further than their original inspirers. From a study of their newspapers Adler illustrates the fact that women from all classes took part in this group activity.<sup>(12)</sup> The Tribune des Femmes gives priority to the plight of proletarian women, and the Gazette des Femmes contains demands of a more bourgeois interest, such as property rights, equality before the law. Among the most prominent women were Eugénie Niboyet, a bourgeoisie from Lyon, Suzanne Voilquin, a seamstress, Pauline Roland, who collaborated with Pierre Leroux. Although from different backgrounds, they were all concerned with the harsh living conditions of the poor, more especially poor women; for by this stage it was apparent that the economic changes brought about by industrial capitalism, were creating a new kind of poverty.

What early or "utopian" socialists, contemporary to Flora Tristan had in common, was their outright condemnation of this inhumane system. It is not the intention of this thesis to elaborate on Flora Tristan's relationship with these contemporary movements as this has already been developed elsewhere,(13) nor indeed is it possible to dwell on all of their ideas. suffice it to say that there was a great deal of diversity but which could be grouped into three types of movements which influenced her: the utopian socialists, mainly intellectuals from the upper classes, such as Fourier, Saint Simon, Considérant, Enfantin, Leroux and Owen, the feminists such as those mentioned above, and and workers' movements led by workers themselves, such as Moreau, Perdiguier, Gosset and Vinçard. Flora Tristan was aware of the range of this diversity when she began writing. Once she had returned from Peru, she herself quickly became part of the cosmopolitan circle of artists and intellectuals of Paris and London. Evidence of this can be seen in her correspondence. Ease of access to the artistic and intellectual milieu was not unusual, as Michaud indicates.(14) Marx and Engels did likewise in 1844. What is striking is that Flora Tristan was able to overcome class and gender barriers in her effort to achieve recognition and go on to capitalize on all kinds of contacts and exchange of ideas with her contemporaries, not just in Paris, but also in London. There is scant evidence about her contact with women, either as individuals or in organisations but it must be remembered that feminist groups as such did not exist; the nineteenth century ideal of domesticity under the Napoleonic Code, ensured that women found it hardest to organise. As already indicated in chapter one, Flora Tristan began her career among

intellectual socialists and ended it organising the workers. This in itself was one of her greatest achievements.

#### (5) STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES AND ACTION PROPOSED

As we have seen in earlier sections, Flora Tristan discovered that freedom and equality depended on birth, economic circumstances and gender. We have seen that this deprivation of liberty and equality through family circumstances led her to realise her common lot with other oppressed people. Not surprisingly, therefore, we have two pamphlets written in an effort to alleviate the immediate practical problems caused by the constraints on her freedom.

In her petition for divorce Flora Tristan used the theme of *liberté* as part of an overall interpretation of the benefits of the revolution of 1789. Here we have a *more specific interpretation of political structures in France:*

Messieurs, notre glorieuse révolution eut l'affranchissement de la pensée pour but, et elle fut accueillie par les acclamations des peuples. Toutes les formes gouvernementales qu'elle établit furent destinées à garantir la durée et à favoriser le développement de cette liberté divine qui renferme toutes les autres. Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.1

She used utilitarian and religious arguments to persuade the *députés* to reintroduce divorce.

The first argument begins by denying that domestic happiness and public morals depend on an unnatural institution invented by Man.

Giving figures to support her claim she declared:

La loi anti-sociale a porté ses fruits: il existe en France plus de 300,000 mariages désunis ... Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.3

She suggested that marriages could be much healthier if the possibility of separation existed and that this would improve public morals; fewer unhappy marriages would reduce the level of crime. Further, she argued that the increasing number of illegitimate children proved that laws could not prevent liaisons and affections from developing.

This argument evokes the cause of happiness and freedom of the individual. The introduction of divorce, Flora Tristan argued, was a step towards freedom in that it freed individuals from a man-made institution, marriage. The abolition of divorce had removed the only remedy to ending extreme unhappiness caused by the very laws which upheld the servitude of the wife to the husband:

... ces élus du parti rétrograde abrogèrent le divorce et ôtèrent ainsi du code le seul remède aux malheurs extrêmes résultant des clauses de servitude qu'il renferme. Ils se précipitèrent dans cette voie avec une aveugle témérité: en rendant la durée des mariages existants alors, perpétuelle de facultative qu'elle était, ils donnèrent à leur loi un effet [illisible] rétroactif et se mirent en opposition avec le principe de liberté des cultes inscrit dans la Charte. Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.2

Again we notice that in a very obscure way she was implying that the law upheld a very unequal relationship between husband and wife. At the very least, she stated, if the law ensured divorce, the worst inequities of such a relationship could be diminished by the provision of one way of escaping the misery caused by its inequality. Yet nowhere is there a direct attack upon the institution of marriage as the cause of the oppression of women; it is more by insinuation, but is equally effective.

When she indicated the dreadful misery and unhappiness she experienced in providing for herself and for her children when her own marriage broke down, Flora Tristan illustrated personally the absence of freedom for women because of their lack of professional and skilled capacities, that is, their lack of social and economic equality:

J'ai fait Messieurs, une rude épreuve des malheurs qu'entraîne l'indissolubilité du mariage. Forcée quoique sans fortune, de me séparer d'avec mon mari, j'ai dû, très jeune encore, pourvoir seule par mon travail à mes besoins et à ceux de mes enfants. Il est rare qu'un tel fardeau n'excède pas les forces de femmes. Il en est peu que reçoivent une éducation appropriée à une profession, et lorsque, sans fortune, elles sont délaissées par leurs maris, ou obligées de se séparer d'avec eux, c'est à la loi qu'il faut attribuer les unions illicites qu'elles forment puisque cette loi ne leur permet pas d'en contracter de légales qui assurent à leurs enfants la protection d'un père.  
Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce pp.3-4

These restrictions for women were caused, of course, by the weakness of their economic position and not just by laws relating to marriage. However, Flora Tristan did not dissociate the two, since she realised that social and economic freedoms were interrelated. Greater legal

freedom for women would result in greater economic and social mobility, and freedom generally. Divorce as it existed before the Napoleonic régime was what she demanded not just out of personal interest, but in the name of humanity whose happiness cannot survive without freedom:

L'intérêt personnel n'est pas le mobile de la démarche que je fais auprès de vous: j'y ai été porté par amour pour mes semblables, convaincue que je suis par ma propre expérience, qu'il ne peut exister de bonheur dans les familles que sous un régime de liberté.  
Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.4

The religious argument attempted to confront the clerical view of divorce and trace the link between the past and present régimes in order to encourage the more progressive, although limited, stance of the July Monarchy. Flora Tristan placed her demand within the historical context by outlining the fate of divorce since 1789. It must be recalled that Flora Tristan was writing to the *deputés* elected on a very limited franchise to the *Chambre* for Louis-Philippe, *Le Roi des Français*. He had acceded to the throne after the 1830 revolution. This July Monarchy recognised to a greater extent than did the previous Bourbon Monarchy (1815 to 1830) the legality of the 1789 Revolution. Flora Tristan was appealing to this acceptance of 1789 when she declared that the great benefit of the French Revolution was to grant freedom, and that all forms of government - referring of course, to the numerous changes of régime in France since 1789 - were intended to guarantee the development of that freedom for its citizens:

Elle [la Revolution] continua l'oeuvre du Christ; reconnut comme conséquence naturelle de la Liberté de la pensée, l'indépendance des affections, lui donna aussi l'existence légale ... le divorce par consentement mutuel ou par la volonté d'une des parties

fut institué ... Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.2

Divorce then was a natural part of this new-found freedom. She explained that although divorce was established by the first republic, it was reduced to the privilege of the very few by Napoleon:

Le despotisme n'a besoin que d'obéissance. Napoléon aurait voulu faire du divorce un privilège régulier. N'osant l'abolir, il lui imposa des conditions outrageantes à la pudeur des familles, et souvent impossible à remplir. Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.2

Despotism is mentioned in two contexts. Napoleon, who had eroded many of the freedoms of the 1789 revolution, was a despot. Without divorce, Flora Tristan added, the union of marriage is a despotic one. Husband and wife are like master and slave. Mutual agreement between spouses depends on a relationship where both partners are on an equal footing, and this includes the possibility of divorce by mutual consent or by the will of one party as had been established by the revolution.

Thus it would seem that in evoking the achievements of 1789, Flora Tristan was disguising her criticism of the oppression of marriage behind the short term demand for divorce. The inequality of the relationship seems to be mentioned as if in passing:

Devant cette institution contre nature s'évanouissent le bonheur domestique et les mœurs publiques. Il est superflu de démontrer que la concorde entre époux, comme dans toute espèce d'association, ne peut résulter que de rapports d'égalité; que l'union hideuse du despotisme et de la servitude pervertit le maître et l'esclave, et que telle est notre nature, qu'il n'est



pas d'affection que la dépendance n'anéantisse.  
Pétition pour le rétablissement du divorce p.1

The above quotation contains muted criticism of relations between spouses, which we know were extremely unequal in the France of 1837. However, the criticism is secondary to the immediate purpose of obtaining the first steps towards pardon from the marital bond. Flora Tristan stated her demand for divorce in terms which she hoped would appeal to the *députés* who had no liking for Napoleon, and who prided themselves in freeing the French from the evils of the Bourbon Monarchy. She was hoping that they would accept some of the less radical aspects of the French Revolution, one of them being the notion that the freedom of the individual, *liberté*, was a right granted and protected by the State. This argument she hoped would appeal to the anti-clericals who were becoming increasingly numerous in France. At the same time she interpreted the 1789 revolution as the work of Christ in an attempt to reconcile the clericals and to stave off any objections from the *élus au parti rétrograde*, who refused to have anything to do with the reintroduction of divorce on the grounds that it was atheistic.

Thus the petition was presented for the good of everyone, with no sexual distinction. An appeal for the freedom of divorce was used to mention in passing much greater evils which affected women, such as sexual inequality before the law, and economic inequality. Flora Tristan cleverly associated despotism and the indissolubility of marriage, opposing it with the idea of freedom and divorce. Her moderate tone and modest demand were in sharp contrast to the reality of her experience,

described by Thibert, in relation to these very restrictions she did not mention:

Elle avait éprouvé dans les circonstances les plus dramatiques, les dispositions barbares du code civil français à l'égard de la femme mariée: l'obligation pour la femme de rester enchaînée au foyer conjugal quand même celui-ci serait un enfer, de sorte que ses essais de fuite y sont considérés comme un délit et qu'elle voit se retourner contre elle, en ce cas, la force publique qui devait la protéger; puis la puissance paternelle, unilatérale, qui donne au seul père un droit sur ces enfants, et lui arrachait les siens. Et pour unique recours contre les abus flagrants de l'autorité maritale la lente procédure de séparation, capable d'amortir les effets du mariage indissoluble sans les supprimer totalement. (15)

Flora Tristan did not limit her attentions to the plight of unhappily married women; rather, she deduced that because of their social, economic and political oppression women were:

Une classe entière, formant la moitié du genre humain  
... Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.3

This recognition of the notion of groups of people formed on an economic or social basis is extremely important at this juncture. While aware that the French Revolution had brought the ideals of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* to the fore, through her own experience, Flora Tristan became aware that the universal application of these ideals was denied. She analysed society in terms of class in that she realised that certain groups of society were deprived of the benefits of the revolution. One of these groups was women. This is made clear in the second pamphlet we shall scrutinise.

Unlike the petition for divorce, this second pamphlet, entitled Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères, did not single out a specific law which hindered women's freedom, but described women as a class, not only a class in one country but one which extended beyond national boundaries. The sufferings and hardships endured by women resulting from their position in society were what they had in common. However, even within this group of people, Flora Tristan recognised that there were considerable social divisions. As in the two previous works mentioned in this pamphlet, Flora Tristan continued to describe how women as a class suffered from a lack of freedom and equality. The analysis is carried one stage further when she argued that something must be done to alter this. This pamphlet proposes another short-term measure which could end the oppression of women as Flora Tristan had experienced.

Reading between the lines of this pamphlet written on her return from Peru and after several trips to London, it would seem apparent that she had encountered great discomfort, rudeness and loneliness as a woman traveller. Indeed she was to have further material to argue her case towards the end of her life; more specific examples of such experiences are given in her diaries Le Tour de France.

Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères is a suggestion to set up an international self-help association which could provide the service of catering for travelling ladies, booking them hotel rooms and procuring necessary contacts for business and leisure. With

an eye for detail, Flora Tristan described how *La société pour les femmes étrangères* could be organised, listing eighteen rules.

What is important for us is not so much the terms of her proposed remedy to end restrictions on women's activities, but rather Flora Tristan's perception of the oppression and her analysis of its cause. Firstly, she identified different social classes among women and described how each social class suffered from a different kind of oppression. Secondly, she looked for an explanation of the cause of oppression in the organisation of society as a whole. Within the context of an immediate aim of helping women is the overall picture of society, which is never lost sight of. This contained the key elements of her future work, elements which will be examined in detail in due course. But first let us see how she described the various social categories of women.

From what she had seen of Peruvian society, it is clear to Flora Tristan that oppression of women takes different forms according to different social categories or class, whether it be the example of negro slave women, Ravanas, or the Lima socialites. Although they would appear to have very little in common, each category of oppression was similar in some way. Flora Tristan therefore had argued that women had something in common, regardless of class. The pamphlet is an attempt to stress the common experience of the oppressive system while acknowledging the differences. Identifying the common element in different forms of female oppression remains today one of the greatest

stumbling blocks for any feminist movement and the importance of such an analysis must not be underestimated.

The choice of travel to express this idea is clever. As Flora Tristan recounted in this pamphlet, the motives for travel and the discomforts experienced varied. For instance, middle and upper class women travelled for leisure and education, yet because of social barriers they did not always succeed in achieving their aims because of the extent of suspicion and mistrust they encountered. This, said Flora Tristan, was a great waste because these women could only improve their culture and contribute something valuable to society by the wealth of their new experiences. Since these women have very little in the way of formal education, they are otherwise confined to superficial and frivolous activities:

Le plus grand malheur des femmes aisées provient de leur oisiveté, ou de ce qu'avec leur mauvaise éducation elles ne peuvent que se créer des occupations frivoles et de peu de durée. Combien gagneraient-elles donc en faisant souvent des voyages agréables et instructifs!  
Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères  
p.15

Middle class business women coming to Paris were easily tricked. But worst of all were the sufferings of lower class women travellers with whom Flora Tristan identified even though she had witnessed upper and middle class women when she travelled as a lady's maid and with her aristocratic Peruvian family. She defined the most oppressed class as:

... la plus nombreuse, la plus intéressante, et sur laquelle semblent se réunir toutes les douleurs, afin de la rendre digne de la plus profonde compassion.

Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères  
p.8

Thus it is with this third class that Flora Tristan's sympathies lay. She realised that they were helpless to save themselves and that their oppression was therefore total. Examples of reasons for travel served to highlight their difficulties. Some women came to Paris after having been seduced and abandoned to hide their shame, or else they were fleeing their husbands and trying to lose their identity in the large city. In each case, these women had one thing in common: their lack of financial resources. Unhappiness could be mitigated in some way by wealth, but the worst off are poor women, the ones with no help:

... car la jeune fille trompée n'eût pas été abandonnée si elle eût été riche, l'Etrangère calomniée n'eût pas été forcée d'abandonner son pays si elle eût été riche : on ne trompe et n'attaque jamais que les faibles et les malheureux. Très peu de femmes riches se trouvent dans la cruelle nécessité de se séparer d'avec leur mari, par l'habitude qu'elles ont d'en vivre presque séparées dès le commencement. Or, ces étrangères se trouvent presque toujours dans le besoin, et souvent même dans la misère. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.9

As she described the unhappy case of these women and depicted their loneliness and suffering, she put it into the context of the much wider group of people who suffer and stated that any society which allowed the masses including these women to suffer is an evil one. This is where her analysis of the general cause of oppression begins to take shape. Why is there so much cruelty and suffering?

She began her pamphlet by talking about the need for a regeneration of humanity. New values were necessary in a new age. The old society of the *Ancien Régime* had crumbled, along with its values. The new society was in the ascendant, but since it had not yet fully come of age its values were in a transitional stage. Flora Tristan referred to the many calls from herself and from her contemporaries for new institutions which could adapt to the new problems and sufferings:

De toute part on entend résonner une voix unanime, qui réclame des institutions nouvelles qui puissent s'adapter aux besoins nouveaux ... Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.3

The evil outcome of the new civilisation is in fact the extent of the misery of the masses. Flora Tristan's interpretation of the notion of change and progress used the French Revolution with its ideals of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* as the basis of the new order. We can see the influence of the Enlightenment and Romanticism in her notion of history as organic change - a natural process of improvement and progress. Yet alongside this natural process we see the idea of helping change by the struggle of the newly formed group of deprived people:

... ces êtres malheureux que notre civilisation condamne à vivre dans la douleur ... Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.3

to gain equality and freedom.

This idea is what came to be known as the dialectic opposition of historic forces - of determination versus voluntarism - which Marxist

socialism was to develop more fully. Flora Tristan considered it vital to contribute to the struggle for change on behalf of the weakest members of the new order in society, although she often referred to the natural process of change. If it was a natural process then why interfere? She realised that something had to be done to have the revolutionary principles applied to every aspect of society:

Notre France, si belle, si grande par les nouvelles idées qui y fermentent, répondra avec un écho retentissant à l'appel que nous lui adressons. Elle ne demande qu'à marcher vers la perfection, aussi, sommes-nous heureux de pouvoir lui montrer un nouveau sentier ouvert devant elle. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.26

This pamphlet contains the seeds of Flora Tristan's awakening as a critic of the new Age of Capitalism. She is a critic, but one lavish in her praise of its benefits applied on an international scale, thanks largely to the French Revolution, which she proudly proclaims. The following extract serves to illustrate this:

Il est bien sûr que les étrangers font en grande partie la richesse des grandes villes, et que les relations de nation à nation font marcher le progrès social d'un pas rapide. On sait l'immense avantage qui est résulté pour l'Europe entière de la révolution de 89. Nos armées victorieuses, sous la république et l'empire, parcoururent toutes les contrées, établirent des relations intimes partout, et apprirent aux peuples à se connaître, à ne plus se mépriser comme par le passé et à profiter de leurs connaissances réciproques. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères pp.13-14

She goes on to mention the wonders of the new Industrial Age and the advantages of travelling for the cause of Internationalism which



would unite all rival nations in one family. It is in this context that she placed the importance of travel for women and the contribution they could play in the cause of international fraternity.

However all is not optimism. She also talked about the:

... barbarie des civilisations modernes. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.13

The evil in society, Flora Tristan explained, was caused by selfishness arising from the values of profit-seeking capitalism with everyone for themselves. Such extreme individualism was wrong. *Fraternité* and association were important for her scheme for the redemption of humanity - to provide an alternative set of values and behaviour without completely breaking with the past.(16)

Before examining the consequences of the call to action let us recapitulate her principles so far.

Flora Tristan had established that hardship and unhappiness existed among all women and among the masses. She realised that the lowest classes were the most exploited and were unable to help themselves. As a consequence of this discovery, and in conjunction with her personal development, she decided that she was destined to undertake a search for the best way to achieve improvement for the benefit of all women and in doing so for the benefit of all humanity. This written evidence and her ensuing career as a social observer and militant socialist are witness to this decision.

The aforementioned works all contain a reference to action, action for personal fulfilment of the author and action to change the social order to ensure greater personal fulfilment for others.

I have already mentioned briefly the voluntarist perception which Flora Tristan shared with her contemporary utopian socialists. Fourier in particular believed that change could be brought about by peaceful means of persuasion and example. It is in this light that Flora Tristan shines. She was convinced it was necessary to appeal to the *députés* to have pity on women, to appeal to society in general, and to enlighten everyone about the causes of unhappiness in order that successful action would be ensured. Yet in her pamphlet Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères she distanced herself from contemporary socialist movements for she was highly critical of their passivity and immobilism:

... tâchons que nos théories ne soient pas assimilées aux utopies morales qui s'élèvent de tout côté, et tombent aussitôt, parce que leurs auteurs ont manqué de prévoyance et d'un esprit mathématique. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.13

In particular, Flora Tristan criticised the utopian socialists because they wanted to reorganise society immediately and completely, and thereby risked ending up by achieving nothing. It was better to start on a small scale, hence her suggestion for setting up a self help association for women travellers. Flora Tristan also dismissed as futile any attempt at constructing an alternative perfect system without indicating the way to achieve this:

Mais le défaut de notre époque est de vouloir trop généraliser : de cette manière, on perd de vue les

moyens de réalisation; on rêve des systèmes parfaits, mais qu'on ne pourra peut-être mettre à exécution que dans deux siècles.

Notre but, ici, n'est pas de faire aussi une brillante utopie, en décrivant le monde comme il devrait être, sans indiquer la route qui pourra nous conduire à réaliser le beau rêve d'un Eden universel.

Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères

p.4

By contrast with her contemporaries then, especially the Fourierists and the Saint-Simonians, although they were not mentioned by name, Flora Tristan was, at this early stage, attracted to a gradualist reformist approach:

Nous voulons des améliorations progressives, et c'est dans ces vues que nous envisageons seulement une partie de l'humanité et de ses malheurs. Nous pensons que si chacun voulait suivre cette marche, en travaillant aux diverses améliorations, selon un aspect spécial, bientôt on verrait poindre le soleil de rédemption et de bonheur. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.4

Her criticism of her contemporaries also focussed on their failure to grasp the type of organisational action necessary to achieve reform. This key idea later became more substantial in her schemes as she developed her socialist campaign. By then it distinguished Flora Tristan from the early utopian socialists in that it eventually led to her final choice of action Union Ouvrière.

As early as Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères, Flora Tristan proclaimed the need to unite in the struggle for a new society. Unity was the key to success:

... une voix qui demande de s'associer, de s'unir pour travailler d'un commun accord à soulager les masses qui souffrent et languissent sans pouvoir se relever ; car, divisées, elles sont faibles ... Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.3

Historical precedent showed there was a much greater chance of success if there was strength in numbers:

Suivons d'abord l'histoire, et nous verrons qu'à chaque époque où une partie de la société souffrait et sentait le besoin d'un changement, des associations ont devancé les réformes. Ces associations avaient pour but de s'entr'aider mutuellement, de secourir les frères affligés et persécutés; car, faibles comme nous le sommes, considérés individuellement, ce n'est que dans l'union que nous pouvons puiser la force, la puissance et la possibilité de faire du bien. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères pp.15-16

#### (6) CONCLUSION: LIMITS OF EGALITARIAN FEMINISM

In the search by Flora Tristan for the best praxis of belief and action, she stumbled across a method, that of association, which she was to use in her final synthesis. For the moment, she did no more than air this as an exhortation for fraternity with the oppressed. The analysis of the oppression of the masses and of the individual within society is a socialist one. Laws are man made and can be changed for the good of everyone. Her class analysis, although in a primitive state, also leads to a socialist stance. The existence of classes is contrary to the notion of equality.

However, it seemed that Flora Tristan would rather tackle a particular material issue of women's oppression than proclaim their equality in principle. On the other hand she realised that it was vital to find a way of putting into practice the ideals of the French Revolution and she made constant reference to the absolute ideal of *fraternité*. This tension between beliefs and action was to cause many a headache for Flora Tristan. A further difficulty facing her at this stage was whether to choose action for, or by, the oppressed. Although she talked about the sufferings of a specific group of women, she appealed to everyone, men and women of all classes, to join the association. Thus the inherent contradictions between sex and class remained latent at this stage. Flora Tristan attempted to resolve this contradiction by a call for a radical overhaul of society. She believed that women had to be granted social and economic freedom and equality before they could play a full part as citizens and before they could find happiness. She also believed she could appeal to men to provide the impetus for implementing changes, by writing a petition to male *deputés*, and by suggesting the creation of a society for men and women. Although she was an egalitarian feminist, believing that women should have equal rights, she considered that this could not be achieved within the existing society. Society would have to be changed drastically. This belief caused her to question every abuse of power, not simply that over women. In Chapter Four we shall see that the study of an advanced industrial society (England) was carried out to assess the nature of exploitation of the two oppressed groups in society. She considered this necessary because she had discovered that oppression of two groups,

women and the proletariat, was a consequence of the same order of society - the exploitation by a few of the masses.

The conclusion to Chapter Two is that the abstract egalitarianism of the French revolutionary philosophers was not sufficient in Flora Tristan's view to combat the growing strength of capitalism as a political, economic and social force. Although the ideals of the French Revolution proclaimed that men and women were equal, the reality was very different. The rejection of abstract egalitarianism as an inadequate ideology led Flora Tristan to search for a concrete philosophy that criticised the shortcomings of the entire system. Feminism could contain the ideas of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, but transcended the abstract theory of natural rights of men and women being equal. Flora Tristan began to look at the notion of the complementary nature of the two sexes to try and explain the predetermined differences between the sexes expected and created by society. She continued her search for the application of her ideas for change in a new form of writing, the novel. Chapter Three will study her one and only novel, *Néphis*.

## Footnotes to Chapter Two

- 1 Jane Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860 (London: Macmillan, 1985) p.1
- 2 See works by Mary Wollstonecraft, such as A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, edited by Miriam Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975)
- 3 A recent revival of her work is useful to illustrate how Olympe de Gouges resembled Flora Tristan, in that feminism was part of her overall perspective of repression. Olympe de Gouges, Oeuvres, présentées par Benoîte Groult (Paris: Collection 'Mille et Une Femmes', Mercure de France, 1986)
- 4 Jane Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism, p.68
- 5 Jane Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism, p.32
- 6 Jane Rendall, The Origins of Modern Feminism, p.3
- 7 For an analysis of the importance of writing for women as a contribution to feminism and the place of Flora Tristan therein, see Lesley Rabine, The Other Side of the Ideal and Deborah Pope, The Development of Feminist Consciousness
- 8 Denys Cuche, 'Le Pérou de Flora Tristan: du rêve à la réalité' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, p.21 (listed under 'ACTES')
- 9 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.74
- 10 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.78
- 11 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.80
- 12 Laure Adler, A l'aube du féminisme: les premières journalistes 1830-1850 (Paris: Payot, 1979). See also Evelyne Sullerot, Histoire de la presse féminine en France des origines à 1848 (Paris: A.Colin, 1966)
- 13 See S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan pp.295-357, and Marguerite Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme français de 1830 à 1850
- 14 Lettres/Flora Tristan réunies, présentées et annotées par Stéphane Michaud (Paris: Seuil, 1980) pp.14-16

- 15 Marguerite Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme français de 1830 à 1850, p.280
- 16 A new edition of Nécessité de faire bon accueil aux femmes étrangères sees this work as the first to analyse what was to become an important feature of French society, the position of immigrants. See Nécessité de faire bon accueil aux femmes étrangères édition présentée et commentée par Denys Cuche (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1988) pp.23-42



## Chapter Three

### MEPHIS: ROMANTIC VISIONS

#### (1) IMAGES OF WOMEN

The first part of this chapter contains a study of the different images of women in the novel Néphis, entitled "*la belle Andalouse*", "*la femme prolétaire*", and "*la femme guide de l'humanité*".

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Flora Tristan was aware that oppression of women varied in form according to class background. In her novel she develops this idea further by presenting images of women at opposite ends of the social spectrum: the wife of "*le prolétaire*" and the wealthy and beautiful aristocrat. Indeed the only woman in a position between these social extremes mentioned in the novel is presented in such a way as to polarise the opposed images: Madame Bernard, the lady companion to Maréquita:

C'était une de ces femmes comme on en rencontre tant, ayant assez de sensibilité pour s'émouvoir à propos dans les circonstances voulues par les convenances, mais pas assez pour en éprouver deux heures d'insomnie ... Néphis  
T.1 p.36

Madame Bernard provides a sounding board for a discussion between the aristocratic heroine and the sole representative of the *petite bourgeoisie* on the role of Art. Madame Bernard, in contrast to Maréquita, fails to "understand" the utility of Art and judges people by their class and wealth. She also represents the single woman who lives by her wits in an extremely precarious position with little job security and uncertain livelihood for her old age, a situation of which Flora Tristan herself had experience. However, despite her ill deserved situation, Flora Tristan denigrates Madame Bernard for her inability to experience depth of feeling. She is happy in the security of material comforts but is incapable of great sentiments. By implication, the women in the lowest and highest classes were attractive to Flora Tristan because their experience gave them dignity. Women of the *petite bourgeoisie*, who of course were also oppressed, did not seem worthy of her attention. The portrayal of these contrasting figures signifies an identification on Flora Tristan's part with the oppression involved. A closer look at each type will reveal much about Flora Tristan's view of women. It will be seen that her view of the woman of the future, the liberated woman, was limited - caused by the narrowness of her romantic vision and it was overshadowed by the Saint-Simonian idea of "*la femme messie*".

(a) "*La Belle Andalouse*"

Is "*la belle Andalouse*" Flora Tristan's heroine and ideal woman, or is she a victim of society to be liberated and therefore to be destroyed for something new?

In the novel the aristocrat woman, (which I have named "*la belle Andalouse*" after the way Flora Tristan describes one of her heroines) is depicted on two levels: firstly Maréquita and Clothilde, the principal characters, are described in some detail; secondly, characterisations of women of that class are constructed out of their behaviour in a social gathering and in discussions of marriage. On both levels, the women are seen to be deficient in some way in that they are imprisoned by their class and social conventions. Maréquita, although financially independent, is unhappy and depressed, a slave to social values, and she needs Méphis to save her. Clothilde fails to reject her family's aristocratic values for her true love, a *prolétaire*. Both are imperfect in the eyes of Méphis because they are not completely free and in control of their own destiny. Yet they are outstanding in their behaviour, enjoying relative freedom when compared with the general crowd, depicted as utter slaves to fashion and convention. The conflict stems from the attributes in Flora Tristan's image of aristocratic women. On the one hand, it is evident that because she paints an image of beautiful heroines with depth of character, possessing wealth and culture, these are qualities which she admires. Flora Tristan made no secret of her enjoyment of beautiful surroundings, clothes, books and paintings, and the setting of Maréquita's home is idyllic, complete with

garden in true Rousseauesque style where no man interferes with nature (*Néphis* T.1 pp.23-24). But on the other hand, the importance attached to the beauty and personal appearance of the heroines would seem to make them no different from the general crowd of fashionable Paris, where qualities of the heroines become blemishes:

... les femmes y viennent rivaliser entre elles de luxe, et là, les petits manéges de la coquetterie captivent leur attention. *Néphis* T.1 p.6

Fashionable women in general are so bored, she writes, that they are obsessed with creating intrigue around passionate love affairs:

En vain ces belles dames, pour échapper au plus cruel ennemi de l'espèce humaine, engagent-elles une intrigue; la passion factice, née d'un caprice du cerveau, fait bien écrire de jolies lettres, mais l'amour ne saurait s'allumer et le coeur reste vide. *Néphis* T.1 p.6

While Flora Tristan despises the emptiness and artificiality of fashion and beauty, the heroines must be and are beautiful, fresh, well dressed, well educated, intelligent and eager for true love. On first reading it would seem that Flora Tristan was idealising these types and setting a high standard for women to live up to, thereby presenting them with an even tighter social strait-jacket than ever before. However, the redeeming factor here is that this is no mere critique of fashion. It is an exposure of the way aristocratic women are condemned to a useless existence. Women are men's playthings; like flowers, as soon as they are withered they are cast to one side:

... lorsque le joli jouet est fané, ou la rose flétrie ... on la jette avec dédain, pour remettre sous le globe une rose

nouvelle; bouton à peine éclos et brillant de fraîcheur.  
*Néphis* T.2 p.97

As long as women act as playthings, frivolous and empty, men will never consider them their equals:

L'homme, habitué à ne voir dans la femme qu'une petite poupée ... ne peut nécessairement considérer cet être-là comme son égal; il ne sent en elle ni force corporelle, ni vigueur morale, et ne peut lui demander ni aide pour ses travaux, ni inspirations pour sa pensée ... *Néphis* T.2 p.97

Therefore, Flora Tristan is exposing the circular process of oppression, a vicious circle it would seem. Women will not be treated as equals by men until they act in a more responsible manner. They cannot act in such a way because they are not given any responsibilities. It is thus the author's intention to destroy the image of perfection and happiness in youth and wealth. It is shown that dress and jewels, wealth and beauty, are symbols of affluence which are insufficient to grant happiness to Maréquita and Clothilde. Although the portrayal of the romantic heroine does hark after a world Flora Tristan yearned for through her aristocratic connections, this perfection is discovered to be their very oppression. Later, in *Promenades dans Londres*, she developed her analysis of the process of upper class female oppression with much greater clarity. In *Néphis* it is often obscure, with the result that the heroine is depicted as being unaware of the mechanism and extent of the oppression. Although she realises she is unhappy, she thinks it is because she has not found true love. She does not realise that her unhappiness stems from her dissatisfaction with the superficiality of the fashionable world, of which she is one of the most

brilliant members. She is therefore insufficiently aware of her condition to comprehend it. The novel *Méphis* is to some extent intended as a consciousness raising exercise for any aristocratic woman who would care to read it. But it was also an educative experience for Flora Tristan herself, for, in the process of writing, she did not have the same ideas by the time she had finished her novel. The high life no longer held for her the same attraction.

Along with a critique of the women among the élite in society, Flora Tristan condemned the equation of women and pleasure, of arranged marriages to suit business interests, and of the double standards of morality for men and women. These points are more fully developed in *Promenades dans Londres*. In *Méphis*, the analysis of the moral degradation and legal restriction of women is secondary to her romantic vision that there was a key motive which controlled human actions. The message of the novel centres on the notion that love could provide this key motive. Hence the reason for the importance attached to love. It is suggested that Flora Tristan "de-emphasised" sexual and familial love in favour of universal love of humanity.<sup>(1)</sup> However, the climax of happiness in the novel still lies in the consummation of the love of Maréquita and Méphis. It would seem that she was torn between ideals of fraternity and universal love of humanity on the one hand, and the cliché of perfect love and fulfilment of the romantic couple on the other.

One way in which the sexual love relationship is downgraded by Flora Tristan is for Méphis to point out to Maréquita at the beginning

of their encounter that even an all-consuming passionate love affair with someone will only last ten to twelve years, and that if we were to depend on this romantic love for inspiration we might as well be dead at thirty six since we no longer have the force to carry on (!):

Si cela était, nous mourrions tous à trente ou trente-six ans, car, passé cet âge, peu de personnes conservent assez d'illusions pour devenir amoureuses. *Néphis* T.1 p.59

He argues that great leaders were inspired by strong sentiments other than romantic love. In dashing Maréquita's one and only ambition, Méphis immediately offers a replacement for her emotional energies which will inspire her to great deeds - the love of humanity:

... faites du bien à vos frères, aimez l'humanité: cet amant ne vous trahira pas et à vingt ans comme à soixante vous pourrez l'aimer passionément. *Néphis* T.1 pp.61-62

Flora was thirty five when she had her novel published, and the transformation of interest from romantic love to universal love is most certainly biographical. As we shall see, her emotional investment in the cause of universal love went from strength to strength to the point of self martyrdom. At this juncture, she had finally realised she would not find prolonged happiness with one person. She therefore decided to intensify her search for an outlet where she could express herself and bring about change for women. Romantic love was the ideal women were expected to aspire to, and yet she was aware that somehow this was inadequate as a motivator for change and that in practice it could only oppress women in marriage.

Throughout the novel there is frequent mention of universal love and the corruption by society of this altruistic motive which could provide the motor for progress. The search for an alternative type of love does not lead to a very clear conclusion, nor does it lead to any practical suggestions. Flora Tristan did however suggest that the woman should not play a passive role in a romantic love relationship, which would suggest giving women greater sexual freedom. Feminists have tried to read some revolutionary meaning into this part of Flora Tristan's work but she does not reveal this explicitly. What was of interest to her was the idea of the love of humanity as a driving force in society and its distortion by the current structures of society:

C'est ainsi chère Maréquita, que, par l'effet des préjugés qui tyrannisent la société, l'amour perd son caractère intellectuel et descend à n'être plus qu'un plaisir immonde! Ce mobile de toutes les vertus humaines, des jouissances de l'âme, perverti par l'orgueil, abruti par les sens, devient la source empoisonnée de mille désordres cachés, des vices dégoûtants qu'étaient les rues des cités, et des crimes que recèlent leurs prisons. *Néphis* T.1 p.314

This Rousseauesque argument suggests that society corrupts human nature by deforming the noble natural sentiments and by causing debauchery and crime. Flora Tristan was thus attributing women's oppression to the consequence of a badly structured society. In a rather indirect manner, she was thus suggesting that this oppression would disappear if society were reorganised. Yet this analysis remains incomplete because of her fascination with the romantic vision of universal love which could make all evil disappear by persuasion alone. When the romantic vision was subsequently dispelled by some hard facts



resulting from social investigations in London, Flora Tristan unambiguously embraced the institutional solution.

In the meantime, what hope did she hold out for aristocratic women? Did she simply condemn licentious pleasure and slavery to conventions? Yes, in the sense that she knew women could not realise their full potential hindered by these artificial constraints. Their personalities were thwarted to fit into the mould required by society, just as their bodies are deformed by corsets (*Néphis* T.2 pp.95-96):

... pauvres femmes, dont le jugement est faussé par le plus tyrannique des systèmes, jusqu'à quand vous imposera-t-on l'absurde obligation de changer votre nature ? pendant combien de temps encore subirez-vous l'alternative de vous renfermer dans une cloître ou d'enchaîner à jamais votre vie à celle d'un maître? *Néphis* T.2 pp.167-168

One of the tightest moulds is marriage: a form of institutionalised domestic slavery. However, although she did condemn the limitations imposed on women, she presented no practical alternative other than the liberation of divorce. She also recognised that marriage often provides a semblance of independence for aristocratic women, freedom from their family to embrace a position of respectability in society. Also, although she could clearly see how marriage institutionalised the power of men over women, she did not relish the idea of solitude and loneliness for single women. Single women had little or no legal status in the France of the nineteenth century. Therefore existence outside marriage could not ensure independence.

Flora Tristan also speaks bitterly about the oppression of women by the Church. She had already witnessed the Church as an ally of despotic power in Peru, maintaining its control by perpetuating the ignorance of the masses through ritualistic processions and almost paganistic cults, contrary, Flora Tristan believed, to the true Christian message. In *Néphis* the theme of the distortion of the Christian ideal is developed further, this time in relation to women. Despite the promising beginning of Christianity for women, Flora Tristan declares that the Roman Catholic Church is no better than the Islamic religion which maintains that women have no soul. Both religions maintain women in a totally submissive role:

Le catholicisme n'est pour rien dans ces améliorations; c'est au temps où il régnait dans toute sa puissance, - pendant le cours du moyen âge, que la femme fut tenue dans la plus sévère dépendance. *Néphis* T.2 p.56

Although Flora Tristan gives a clear analysis of oppression of aristocratic women through institutions and social conventions, there is a general confusion and ambiguity in her suggestions of alternative forms of behaviour. We have seen in *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* Flora Tristan was greatly in awe of women who seemed to be in control of their own destiny, but in her novel she was resigned to saying there is very little alternative for the majority of women:

Etrange contradiction! la toute puissance maritale, consacrée par la loi, est repoussée avec horreur par les mœurs; toutes les jeunes filles abhorrent la tyrannie, rient des maris ridicules que la scène et les romans leur présentent, toutes cependant désirent se marier, puisque malheureusement c'est le seul moyen que d'absurdes préjugés leur laissent pour arriver à jouir d'une certaine

indépendance que leur famille et la société leur refusent.  
*Néphis* T.2 p.204

It could be that some women were aware of the trap of marriage, but Flora Tristan claimed that all women are conscious of the contradiction between the spirit of liberty which every other law embodied, and the tyranny of marriage. So while she was describing how successfully women are duped into being married to tyrants, she had them fully conscious of their oppression. Yet she gives no indication of any women trying to positively act to escape from this trap, either on a collective or on an individual basis. Does she see them as poised, ready for action? Dijkstra is convinced that Flora Tristan deliberately ignored the women's movements of her day, which would suggest that this was not the case. But I still consider that she was convinced that most women were on the first step to emancipation by being conscious of their oppression. Nevertheless, there are flaws in Flora Tristan's treatment of this question which I would suggest were caused by her obsession with the power of emotions and sentiment as a driving force in society, and with the idea of "*la femme messie*". As we shall see in the following chapter, once her class analysis comes more sharply into focus, based on social observation rather than on the romantic visions of a novel, many of the oversights are eliminated.

To end this section on a more hopeful note, Flora Tristan does voice her solution in a primitive form when she suggests that the way to end women's oppression is in their education, something which was considered

unnecessary by the State at the time. This solution is expanded at a later stage:

Oh! si les femmes recevaient une autre éducation, si, au lieu de les élever comme des odalisques pour plaire et servir, on les rendait propres à remplir le rôle sublime d'inspirer et de guider le compagnon auquel la Providence les a destinées, l'intelligence humaine s'accroîtrait dans un siècle plus qu'elle ne l'a fait pendant le cours de toutes les générations passées, et l'harmonie régnerait au sein des sociétés, parce qu'il y aurait équilibre entre les forces musculaires de l'homme et l'intelligence de la femme. *Néphis* T.1 p.126

The important things to recognise here are: educating women should have a beneficial effect on everyone; women's function or role is to inspire men to guide his actions; women and men have a complementary nature.

What has this to do with the lifestyle of the aristocracy? Flora Tristan was convinced that women were oppressed, with or without money. Aristocratic women frittered away their talents on trivial matters whereas, educated, they could influence society for the better. This interpretation depends on her view of the role of the upper classes which we shall discuss in the section on class. Somehow, Flora Tristan expected that aristocratic women, because they were oppressed themselves, would embrace the cause of suffering humanity, in other words the proletariat, and work for the alleviation of society's ills. In the third section on Images of Women, "*la femme guide de l'humanité*", the question of the education of women will be discussed in greater detail. Now it is necessary to consider the opposite end of the social

ladder where the suffering masses are personified in "*le prolétaire*" and more specifically "*la femme prolétaire*".

(b) "*La Femme Prolétaire*"

So far, much attention has been paid to women in the upper classes. Quite clearly Flora Tristan had not forgotten her aristocratic experience in Peru and admired the material life style that wealth afforded women of that class. The novel, however, is called *Néphis ou le prolétaire*. Perhaps as further evidence of class awareness in her novel it is time to say that Flora Tristan admired the proletarian woman for entirely different reasons. For instance, the criticism of society which equated women with sensuality and emotion, which condemned the tyranny of marriage and the frivolity of uneducated women: all these are restricted to the world of the upper classes simply because these women had more time to dwell on such matters since they were not faced with the daily drudgery of keeping themselves and their families. What then are the characteristics of "*la femme prolétaire*" which are of interest to our author?

The most valid contribution of Flora Tristan's feminism in presenting an image of "*la femme prolétaire*" is the vivid description of the vicious circle of poverty and drudgery in which the proletarian woman finds herself. Here Flora Tristan gives a poignant account of the double task of the proletarian woman, that of going out to work - often she is the only breadwinner of the family - and that of looking after

the needs of husband and children. Work outside the family begins for a young girl at the age of thirteen or fourteen. Marriage, of economic necessity, does not bring happiness but a hard master; the love mothers feel for their young children is the only relief from their hardship. The intensity of this hardship and oppression of the proletarian woman is portrayed in a particularly effective passage of a mere two pages in a novel of seven hundred and fifty. This powerful passage is relevant to the lives of many women the world over, even today. The qualities Flora Tristan admires in proletarian women are their dignity and forbearance. Their strength is in the endurance of their oppression. Aristocratic women are not seen in such vital terms. Such is the extent of their oppression that women themselves could never be the instrument of their emancipation. Society itself must free them, and by improving their lot, society would improve dramatically as a whole:

Il faut avoir été témoin de l'activité de ces femmes, de leur bon sens à apprécier toute chose selon sa véritable importance, de leur patience à supporter les peines morales et physiques dont elles sont accablées, de la sympathie qu'elles témoignent pour celles d'autrui. *Néphis*  
T.1 p.156

Marguerite Thibert points out that Flora Tristan's idealisation of the proletarian woman and her romantic visions of the working class woman's ability to rise above her sufferings and become aware of how to change her oppression were to be dispelled by the wary reception she was given and the complete lack of interest on the part of the proletarian women.(2) In her novel, Flora Tristan places great hopes in the powerful impact that changing the role of working class women would have on society as a whole. She assumes that it is because the

proletarian woman is capable of enduring such hardships that she is a superior being and is therefore on the brink of being aware of her oppression:

Il est peu de personnes qui se doutent combien on rencontre communément, parmi les prolétaires, des femmes d'une intelligence remarquable: chez presque toutes, il existe des qualités et des vertus qu'on chercherait vainement dans les rangs des classes supérieures. *Néphis* T.1 p.155

However, the predominant qualities which Flora Tristan found in proletarian women were qualities of passivity and resignation, hardly the stuff of revolutionary consciousness. Yet it was this capacity to endure hardship, in Flora Tristan's analysis, which proved that they were morally superior to men, and not their revolutionary consciousness. But the moral superiority which Flora Tristan attributes to proletarian women indicates that she accepts the notion of complementary natures of the sexes. The conclusion of her case in her novel thus centred around her idea of different qualities for men and women. Had this conclusion remained unchanged, her feminism and socialism would not have developed into a pivotal force of liberation. Women would have been condemned to resign themselves to their poverty in the proletarian class:

En visitant ces intérieurs de prolétaires, j'eus de fréquentes occasions de reconnaître la supériorité de la femme. Elle a en général, plus d'empire sur elle-même, aussi est-elle presque toujours la caissière du ménage, et quoique la plus grande part des souffrances lui échoit, on rencontre chez elle une douceur, une urbanité, une résignation qui ont toujours excité mon étonnement et mon admiration. *Néphis* T.1 p.228

Resignation and gentle passivity are great qualities within women, but they do not advance the feminist socialist cause:

Ah! Maréquita, détrompez-vous, non seulement vos dévouements n'adoucissent en rien nos malheurs, mais presque toujours, au contraire, ils nous en occasionnent de plus grands. *Néphis* T.2 p.95

It is indeed obvious that in the novel *Néphis*, Flora Tristan was speaking from her own personal experience of impoverishment, and not from close contact with the urban working class. However, what is important is that she deduced from her study of the exploitation of women in the proletariat that there can be no emancipation of that class without emancipation of women. She argued that the woman's influence through strong family ties is more powerful within the proletariat. In her novel, the idea of women being the pivotal force of feminism and socialism is sparked off despite their resignation and passivity, but it is through the force of education that change will occur. Educate women and the whole family life improves and, by extension, the moral and material existence of the proletariat must also improve.

In the novel, there is a proletarian heroine, albeit a silent one. What hope is there for her? Education and a happier family life? Family life is taken completely for granted as a datum. No mention is made of women as independent economic entities. A happy family life is an essential factor in the plan of social improvement. This was certainly extremely limiting in terms of the interchangeability of roles of men and women within the family, and far from liberating for women outside it. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Flora Tristan's



projection of the liberated proletarian woman was severely hampered by the overall view of "*la femme guide de l'humanité*". Later, during the course of her investigations, more perceptive remarks are made about the nature of family life within the capitalist system and on the possibility of equal work for equal pay. Only this type of radical change could mean anything for a truly liberating solution for "*la femme prolétaire*", freedom from the obligation of family life and economic independence, that is, the right to work.

The picture of the oppression of "*la femme prolétaire*" is romanticised but it served the purpose of incorporating the lowest class in society into the general plan of regeneration through "*la femme guide*". Flora Tristan was probably unaware of the fact that she had stumbled on the seed of one of the most important aspects - it was her most original idea, that of the feminist socialist message. Germination of the idea almost certainly took place during the course of writing the novel. The idea grew as she made her investigations in England and in France. Its fruit was borne in the shape of the programme of Union Ouvrière.

(c) "*La Femme Guide de l'Humanité*"(3)

Nowhere in Flora Tristan's work was the influence of Saint-Simoniansm stronger than in her Néphis because it is here that she develops the idea of "*la femme guide*" as a possible solution to the end of oppression of women and the proletariat. Although her class

analysis was frequently distorted and although her understanding of the capitalist system was also vague (as we shall see in the next section), the pivotal force of feminism and socialism incorporated into this third image took shape in her novel and was henceforth never relinquished.

It is therefore my intention to outline Flora Tristan's version of "*la femme messie*" and to compare it briefly with the *Enfantin* invention. In this way it will be shown that socialism was an integral part of her feminism, although at the time she was unaware of the potential force of socialist action until she carried out her social investigations of oppression.

So far we have seen that Flora Tristan attributes qualities of feeling, beauty, self sacrifice, to her heroines. Any ability to act as a free spirit inevitably meant becoming a pariah.

What kind of woman is "*la femme guide de l'humanité*"? We shall see that she does not embody Flora Tristan's ideal of a perfect woman, but this is incidental to her ability to inspire. In fact, curiously enough, this ability to inspire seems to be independent of her own action, for in the novel, it is a man who decides who this "*femme guide*" is and how she must be:

Vous êtes la réalisation du rêve que j'avais presque abandonné; c'est ainsi que je conçois la sublimité du rôle de la femme. *Néphis* T.1 p.53

Her first quality is a gift, a capacity to inspire. The irony here of course is that in *Néphis*, the man spends the whole novel trying to educate his so called ideal woman so that she will be "worthy" enough to inspire him. Carried on a step further, a similar relationship existed between Flora Tristan and the working class. She spent the last year of her life telling the workers how they should act to help themselves. Women were not intuitively or naturally able to inspire; they had to be taught. If women are taught, they can better their own position and that very process should bring advantages to all. Applied to the proletarian class and the wealthy classes, it means an end to material deprivation and an end to the moral degradation of women.

In the novel, the illustration of "*la femme guide*" is made in a painting the hero undertakes for a competition. A woman alone is leading a crowd. The artist intends to show the moral superiority of women above even the Church:

C'était l'idéalisation de la femme ainsi que je la concevais, entraînant par sa puissance attractive l'humanité vers la perfection. Cette femme, qui dans ma pensée résumait tout son sexe, comme source de vie et moteur de progrès ne devait appartenir par son costume à aucune époque. *Néphis* T.1 pp.181-182

Is this in itself justification for the need for greater freedom for women? Does this put women on a par with men in intellectual ability? Indeed it does not. It is an extremely vague statement. However much one may emphasise the moral superiority of women, presented in an historic vacuum as it is above, without reference to social, political or economic values, it means absolutely nothing in feminist terms:

Sur le premier plan et à la suite de la femme *guide de l'humanité*, se trouvait une foule de personnages ... qui ... ont été assez supérieurs pour avouer l'influence inspiratrice qu'avaient eue, dans leur conduite, les conseils de la femme, et pour reconnaître que c'est le rôle moral qui lui a été réservé par la Providence, afin de contre-balancer les forces musculaires de l'homme.  
*Méphis* T.1 pp.182-183

Rousseau is depicted among the crowd, being counted as one of those who recognise the moral superiority of women. With hindsight, we could say that this was an unfortunate choice of hers since that same person considered that women were naturally endowed with qualities which fitted them for the domestic role. Left in that context, the position of women is anything but clear. However, the novel does contain some qualifications, dispelling the ambiguity to a certain degree. In describing the new morality he wants to preach, *Méphis* puts sexual equality high in priority:

L'indépendance individuelle, l'égalité de droits, sans distinction de sexe, eussent été les principes de cette morale ... *Méphis* T.1 p.319

Nevertheless, there is little talk of the practical implementation of equality before the law, equality of marriage partners, independence from family life, equality of job opportunities and wages. The feminism expressed through the idea of "*la femme guide de l'humanité*" is of a moralistic kind. Neither is it exclusively for the benefit of women; it does not simply call for improvements for women alone, on the contrary:

... si ... vous avez étudié les causes des malheurs qui affligent la société, dégradent l'homme, avilissent la femme ... *Méphis* T.2 p.93

What is emphasised throughout the novel is that despite or because of their oppression, women are superior; they are more spiritual and closer to God no matter what the teachings of institutionalised religion say. This moral superiority is deliberately depicted to counterbalance women's historical sense of inferiority:

... dans l'opinion de Méphis, la femme n'était pas uniquement destinée au rôle passif d'abnégation et d'obéissance que lui assigne l'interprétation romaine de l'Evangile. Dans la nouvelle loi qu'il se proposait de prêcher, la mission de la femme était *d'inspirer* l'homme, d'élever son âme au dessus des vaines opinions du monde, de l'obliger par la constance de ses efforts, à se rendre capable de grandes choses. L'observation et le raisonnement avaient convaincu Méphis que tant qu'on ne saurait pas utiliser convenablement les facultés intellectuelles de la femme, l'humanité progresserait très lentement; car selon lui, la femme réfléchit la *lumière divine*. *Méphis* T.2 pp.91-92

Again it is vital to emphasise that although it was expressed in terms of ethical categories, the feminism Flora Tristan expressed in her novel was to benefit the whole of humanity as well as women in particular. Therefore, women were to be the instruments of social change as well as the beneficiaries.

This "*femme guide*" is a sister to "*la femme messie*" of the Saint-Simonians. Like her, she has come to liberate the world from brute force; like her, she is the driving force in progress for humanity; like her, she has divine intuition; like her, she is the intermediary between God and Man, and like her Saint-Simonian sister, she is inspired by love, "*le mobile de tous les sens*" which always acts in conjunction with truth and goodness.

Nevertheless there are differences. In the picture painted by Méphis, the woman is marching alone, ahead even of the clergy, whereas Enfantin proclaimed the search for an ideal woman to take her place beside the man, thus forming a couple as leader. This difference of sexual status would suggest that Flora Tristan could clearly see the limitations of a policy based on "*la femme messie*", for limitations there certainly were.

It was probably the Enfantin (male invented) feminism of which Flora Tristan was most critical. Although an autonomous feminist movement did grow up, Saint-Simonian feminism was largely the creation of one man, Enfantin. Many women responded to the "call" and once they had gathered in Saint-Simonian circles, it was not long before they began to formulate their own feminism, directly related to the reality of their experience. But as long as Enfantin dominated the scene, lengthy debates went on - from 1829 to 1831 - on the exact role of women in future society, always ending with Enfantin telling the women what they should think and be.

Claire Goldberg-Moses writes that at first the Saint-Simonians debated which form the women's public role should take:

Enfantin envisaged an equal but different role for each sex. The new world order would be ruled by a 'couple-pope,' the male to represent 'reflection,' the female 'sentiment.'<sup>(4)</sup>

At first reading, this suggests that Enfantin had fully accepted the prevailing prejudice of his era, that men and women were innately

different, and that women were emotional rather than rational creatures. Flora Tristan's vision that women had particular qualities endowing them with an ability to inspire men also reiterates this notion. What is common to both feminisms is that both prized emotion, the female quality, thus raising the status of the female sex and discarding the Enlightenment egalitarian notion of the value of reason, a male quality:

Saint-Simonians preached that only a sentiment - the universal empathy of humans for humans, termed 'love' - and not reason could provide a strong and solid bond for a peaceful society.(5)

In her novel, using the Saint-Simonian argument, Flora Tristan was proclaiming that the future direction of the new Age could be entrusted only to those who were especially endowed with this sentiment, women and artists. The twist to the story is that this did not broaden horizons much for women, nor did it release men and women from their traditional roles, but it dramatically increased the value of the sentiments normally associated with women and as such was an attack on the Romantic patriarchal values of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. For the Saint-Simonians this meant that women should participate in all public functions if they were to improve society, instead of having a restricted role at home.

Throughout these debates on the role of women, anyone who disagreed with Enfantin was forced to leave the movement; indeed, almost all the schisms in the "movement" were caused by differences on this very question. For instance, Buchez, in line with the French Revolution and the radical tradition of individual rights, believed that individuals of

both sexes were born similar in capacity and character. He ascribed sexual differences to socialisation and education. While it is known that Flora Tristan did attend some general meetings of Saint-Simonians, she was not involved in the furious debates on this issue. Although she was fully aware of the egalitarian argument, she abandoned it in her novel. Rather, she emphasised the harmonious association of different classes and sexes in her plans for the moral regeneration of humanity. In this scheme, individual rights are equated with selfishness, greed and entrenched inequality. A policy based on individualism of the new capitalist society, indeed politics itself, is given short shrift, and the semi-religious morality Méphis is trying to establish advocates association.

When Buchez left the movement in 1829, a further schism developed over the question of sexual freedom and morality. Enfantin proclaimed a new liberated sexual era but retreated when he saw how badly received his suggestion was. In proposing that the emancipation of women required the "*rehabilitation de la chair*", he was turning upside down the common prejudice of associating women with "carnal sin" by decreeing that the pleasures of the flesh were virtuous.

The creative period of discussions around the role of women ended in an impasse with the final policy proclaimed by Enfantin as "*l'attente de la femme messie*". Rather than establishing new possibilities of greater freedom for men and women, it was decided that a new morality could not be divined by man alone, but was incomplete without the female messiah:



During the next two years, Saint-Simonian activism gave way to Saint-Simonian mysticism. 'Missionaries' ventured out of Paris into the provinces and even to other countries in search of 'La Femme.' Apostles preached that the 'search' must take precedence over all other efforts of social regeneration.(6)

It is this particular experience which Flora Tristan uses for her novel. The hero believes he has found "*la femme*"; he has determined who this regenerating force is going to be and what she must be like. But how can this idea serve to liberate women? It simply replaces one set of values for another, both predetermining the nature of women. Therefore, the new system is just as oppressive as the old. In the Saint-Simonian experience, the higher the woman was raised in moral status, the lower her position in the movement's direction and power.(7) Perhaps this experience was warning enough for Flora Tristan since she abandoned the idea of "*la femme guide*" as a potential revolutionary force after she wrote her novel. She did retain some of the idea in interpreting her own cause as a messianic one, but that never became a predominant notion.

In practical terms, Saint-Simonian feminism achieved little because it did not seek to grant women greater freedom and equality by changing social, economic and political structures. Rather it wished to establish a new moral order which would value the distinctive qualities of women - as they have been determined and moulded by previous civilisations. As Goldstein remarks:

In short, the Saint-Simonians opposed emancipating 'la femme' until the world became feminized. Such was the gist of their feminism.(8)

They believed in an eternal femininity and wanted a new order to incorporate women as they were. But if we accept that women are equal to men in their potential, then this eternal nature would seem to be eternally limited. Saint-Simonian feminism believed that women were and always would be different from men. This is a limitation in itself.

As long as Flora Tristan was to use the idea of the complementary nature of the sexes, her analysis of feminism and indeed her socialism were similarly curtailed. But her "*femme guide de l'humanité*" was different from "*la femme messie*", different enough to permit her to fuse feminism and socialism in the future in a way the Saint-Simonians never did. For them, the proletariat and women were entirely separate.

The romantic vision of a couple in *Néphis* is a woman and a *prolétaire*. It is their daughter, the fruit of their union, who is delegated the task of transmitting the message of the new order. Therefore the difference between the ideas of "*la femme guide*" and "*la femme messie*" is that the "*femme guide*" idea does not progress in importance and become an end in itself as it did in the Saint-Simonian movement. Flora Tristan uses the idea, certainly, as do the Saint-Simonians to revalue the status of women, but she incorporates the new status in an overall plan. She does not neglect the other partner in her couple, "*le prolétaire*". Indeed she eventually develops her plan with a complementary and integral role wherein their joint liberation

are mutually dependent and inseparable. However, although she can see the limitations of the Saint-Simonian message, her concentration on the moral regeneration of women rather than on the practical task of building a new social order tends to limit her vision. These limitations are shed to some extent during the next phase of her work when she recorded factual observations in *Promenades dans Londres* and even more so during her militant campaign for the unity of the working class and its development as a potential revolutionary force.

For the meantime, no indication is given of how women can combine in solidarity; no plan for the working class is presented. The "message" is broadcast in true Saint-Simonian fashion through one man, *Méphis*.

How Flora Tristan analysed the various social components of society, that is, the classes, in *Méphis* is the concern of the next section.

## (2) CLASS DISTORTIONS

We have examined the images of women with little reference to the implications of class differences. It is important to discuss the extent of Flora Tristan's perception of class in order to assess the nature of her socialist awareness. It is intended to show that her class perception amounted to distortion in socialist terms; even though the *prolétaire* was the so-called hero of the novel, he was an atypical *prolétaire*. It seems, therefore, that of the two sets of beliefs in her mind when writing the novel, feminism was the more securely established.

Nevertheless, writing the novel was a positive experience for both her feminism and her socialism, since each was developed to some extent in the course of writing the book. Certainly the genre was to be abandoned for a more factual form of writing, as shall be seen in the following chapter.

(a) *'Les Tribulations du Riche'*

Although the aristocracy and the new wealthy class, the bourgeoisie, are each represented in the novel, often the distinction between these two groups is blurred because Flora Tristan herself does not see a clear separation - a reflection perhaps of the transitional stage of the bourgeoisie assuming power and establishing their values as universal ones. The new wealthy classes met with opposition and resistance from the old order of the aristocracy. In her concern with moral regeneration as a means of achieving change in society, Flora Tristan provides the reader with a critique of the values and roles of both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

She often expresses a certain degree of nostalgia for the past: in this case for the days before the fall of the Restoration Monarchy:

Sous la restauration, il y avait du patriotisme, de l'enthousiasme et de l'énergie; - rien de tout cela n'existe actuellement. - Le calme paraît régner; les vétérans de l'empire et de la restauration, les patriotes de 89 et les partisans au droit divin ont disparu de la scène; - tous les efforts convergent vers l'inique but de gagner de l'argent, et la gent mercantile règne sans partage. *Néphis*  
T.1 p.319

This nostalgia is more than a personal regret for her ancestral aristocratic connections lost through her illegitimate birth. The nostalgia occurs when she criticises the values of the new capitalist class, bankers, industrialists and businessmen.

Although she recognises that liberty is a valuable achievement of the French Revolution, she discovers that it has not had a beneficial effect on the working class, the majority of the population. The notions of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* have been distorted at the hands of the bourgeoisie to justify its powerful position. The bourgeoisie (which she does not describe as such - she has several other names for the wealthy classes) has one aim, and that is to make money. In whatever way they have acquired their wealth, the upper classes are still corrupt even after the French Revolution:

Les gens de banque et de négoce ont acquis leur fortune en sacrifiant sans cesse l'intérêt d'autrui au leur; les hommes nés avec des richesses n'ont connu ni les malheurs ni les obstacles ... *Méphis* T.1 p.34

This illustrates Flora Tristan's perception of the differences between the two upper classes, that is, the manner by which they have acquired their wealth, one through ruthless actions, the other through inheritance, which for different reasons renders them both incapable of the sentiment of universal love. Protected by wealth from the hard school of life, poverty and hardship, they are incapable of great depth of feeling. Flora Tristan invariably equates wealth with corruption of sentiment. For instance, the mother of Jean Labarre, or *Méphis*, is opposed to the offer of adoption of her son by a wealthy Englishwoman:

... elle craignait que l'amour de l'or ne remplacât dans le coeur de son fils le dévouement à sa famille et aux compagnons de son enfance. Néphis T.1 p.114

This is a very simplistic opposition of familial love and devotion of the proletariat to the corruptive influence of money. In her subsequent contact with the working class, Flora Tristan was to express more fully a different kind of corruption due to lack of money: miserable family atmosphere, illness and crime because of material deprivation.

However, what is important to remember is that Flora Tristan considered that the wealthy classes were equally in need of salvation. By the time she wrote Union Ouvrière, she concentrated more on the salvation of one class - the proletariat. All her energies and attention were there diverted from the universal message to a class message. In the novel Néphis she is trying to present a vision for all classes.

The aristocracy is described with reference to its economic uselessness and idleness. In talking of the change from the feudal system to the capitalist one, she acidly and astutely shows how the value attached to idleness in the feudal system is transferred to possessions in the capitalist system:

Le travail a été si longtemps le partage de l'esclave, du serf, de l'affranchi, que l'oisiveté en a conservé un orgueil nobiliaire et elle reçoit toujours les égards de la foule imbécile. - Ensuite, comme l'argent a remplacé les puissances féodale, sacerdotale et populaire, il est devenu depuis lors la mesure de tout mérite, la source de toute distinction; n'importe la manière dont vous l'avez acquis, c'est sur la quantité que vous en possédez que se

détermine la considération qu'on vous accorde. *Méphis* T.1  
p.223

The idleness of the aristocracy is best represented through the dandy, the Marquis de Torepa, a useless member of society. The only way the aristocracy can fill their existence is by spending - not everything they own, for they seem to have an inexhaustible supply of income - the only positive suggestion Maréquita has to offer to the marquis is to patronise the Arts. Flora Tristan actually suggested that the aristocracy could find some moral regeneration in doing so.

As for the business classes, Méphis is to set the example of preaching his new morality through his business contacts:

Mes plans politiques m'entraînerent à m'intéresser à plusieurs établissements manufacturiers qui se formaient, et à ouvrir des crédits à des fabriques déjà établies; je devenais ainsi le mobile, le chef occulte d'une armée d'ouvriers, que je pouvais à ma convenance maintenir en paix ou porter à l'insurrection selon que je faisais des avances, ou que je retirais les crédits aux fabricants qui les employaient ... *Méphis* T.1 pp.321-322

Here is the greatest weakness of Flora Tristan's class analysis. She expects the new wealthy classes, the bourgeoisie, to bring progress by increasing their commercial enterprises and to preach a new morality ending exploitation of the masses. Before we examine the motive of exploitation let us look at the new type of businessman a little more closely. He realises he has power since many factories and firms are dependent on him. Through his contacts he is expected to preach, but

what, and to whom? This is not disclosed in the novel. We simply know it to be the new religion based on universal love:

... j'en profitais pour répandre en tous lieux mes doctrines réformatrices. Néphis T.1 p.322

To understand the full significance of the enlightened businessman's actions it is necessary to dwell on the Saint-Simonian experience, since this is what Flora Tristan had in mind.

The Saint-Simonians created a movement after the death in 1825 of the *comte* Henri de Saint-Simon, a thinker who was their inspiration but never their leader. For a short while (from 1826 to 1836), Saint-Simonianism became enormously popular, even beyond France. Their activities were primarily propagandistic and centred around the themes of socialism, pacifism and feminism. Their message was that a new peaceful relationship between the classes should replace social conflict, that the work of the industrialist and the proletariat should be equally valued, even if not equally remunerated, and that the inheritance of wealth, although not the private ownership of property, should be abolished. All of these points are developed in Flora Tristan's novel. In addition, the actual methods (peaceful ones) of trying to achieve social change were used by Flora Tristan, preaching to the working class and embarking on various entrepreneurial schemes. The aloofness of the Saint-Simonians from purely political questions is also echoed in the novel.



Flora Tristan does not envisage the disappearance of the capitalist class but its reform. Indeed, she has a warning for it which actually suggests a loyalty to the upper classes rather than to the proletariat, thereby showing that her socialism was not based on loyalty first and foremost to the proletariat, the exploited class. The warning is the threat of insurrection if concessions are not granted to the masses. In prison, Méphis is given a warning by "un homme du peuple":

... si l'on ne veut pas que le peuple se révolte, détruise tout, il faut le rendre heureux, où l'empêcher d'apprendre à lire; car du moment qu'il peut comprendre par ses lectures, que son sort n'est pas changé, que la liberté dont on l'a leurré n'est qu'un vain nom, qu'il est toujours le très humble esclave des riches, dès lors on court le risque de le voir se ruer sur les riches. *Méphis* T.1 pp.205-206

In this way the message from the hero in the novel *Méphis* becomes a consciousness raising exercise for members of the business class who need to change; because of their corruption they are unhappy, and if they do not want a rebellion on their hands they must improve the condition of the working class by ending corruption and by becoming good businessmen!

Flora Tristan depicts the physical separation between the upper classes and the proletariat through the eyes of the former. The misery of the proletariat, she explains, is kept out of sight and therefore out of mind. In her novel *Méphis*, she attempts to break this myopia by publicising the misery of the proletariat, a role which she continues to play in *Promenades dans Londres*:

Ah! si vous connaissiez toute la masse de misères qui accablent les esclaves de la propriété ... les douloureuses angoisses de ce peuple dont on parle tant et dont on s'occupe si peu, vous frémiriez à ce nom de *prolétaire*!  
*Méphïs* T.1 p.99

The objective is to persuade the upper classes to do something to improve the conditions of the poor. The following section is a study of her presentation of "*le prolétaire*" in her novel.

(b) "*Le Prolétaire*"

As the title of the novel implies, there is something vital about "*le prolétaire*". However, this does not mean that the entire action of the novel takes place within that class setting. The male protagonist in the novel spends his career trying to escape from his proletarian background. As Dominique Desanti stresses:

... Méphis - diminutif de Méphisto, esprit de malheur et non du mal ... (9)

is as much an outsider and a pariah because of his class background as Maréquita and Flora Tristan were because of their illegitimate birth:

« Prolétaire » est synonyme de damné (comme dans « les damnés de la terre » ). On peut devenir millionnaire : si l'on est un paria on reste prolétaire. Méphis peut être médecin ou banquier, peu importe : né au bas de l'échelle, on demeure un « damné social » à jamais « prolétaire ».  
(10)

The notion of class is displayed around a *prolétaire* who tries to escape from his origins. *Prolétaire* by birth, the *raison d'être* of his story is his failed attempt to become a member of the upper class. The hero is therefore an outsider to both classes, in a good position to describe the misery of his original class because of the exploitation by the upper class which he envies. Méphis the hero is used as a social observer; in his career he encounters many professions and activities, all in an urban environment.(11)

In Méphis's personal failure to become a member of the upper class through his own endeavours - he eventually marries the ugly and evil daughter of a wealthy banker - Flora Tristan is showing that individual effort is doomed to failure. The whole structure of society must be altered so as to render social mobility, through meritocracy, possible. By making her hero highly gifted and well educated, Flora Tristan implies that "*le prolétaire*" is potentially equal if not superior to any Lord Arthur, but that this talent is unavailing. "*Le prolétaire*" cannot become part of the establishment without social contact which could serve as a password or a key to success. This leads Flora Tristan to conclude through her hero that the academic education he received is practically useless as a key to success:

... à quoi me servait ce que j'avais appris, puisque sans fortune je ne pouvais me mettre en position d'en tirer aucun avantage. - Maréquita, la seule instruction qu'il faut donner au peuple, la seule dont il peut faire usage, c'est l'apprentissage des métiers ! Voilà pour lui le plus utile de tous les enseignements. *Méphis* T.1 pp.221-222

The use of Méphis the hero as a social observer mirrors Flora Tristan's view of what she herself was doing, recording the details and circumstances of each social group encountered:

Le même esprit d'observation qui m'avait porté à étudier mes compagnons de la conciergerie, dirigea mon attention sur les hommes avec lesquels je me trouvais en contact. - Le soir, j'écrivais mes remarques de la journée. *Méphis* T.1 p.225

Méphis claims to be concerned with the misery of one particular class, the proletariat, thereby recognising that even if he himself succeeds in escaping from the misery of abject poverty the masses could not possibly do the same thing. Therefore, as a comfort for one individual, social mobility may provide an answer; as an alleviation of the misery of a class that solution is futile. This *prolétaire*, Méphis, learns a lesson from his position as an outcast from the upper echelons of society. He begins to generalise on his personal experience:

A cette époque, je conçus l'idée de recueillir des notes, pour esquisser un jour le tableau de la situation morale et physique du peuple en France, et spécialement à Paris. *Méphis* T.1 pp.225-226

Again this has an autobiographical ring to it, signifying what Flora Tristan herself had in mind when she recorded the notes in her diary during her *Tour de France*. The aim behind this detailed recording of poverty is to show the extent of exploitation.

Méphis records that a salary permits the worker to live on subsistence level, no more, no less. (*Méphis* T.1 pp.226-229) In her

novel, Flora Tristan recognises how dependent a worker is on the wage rate fixed at subsistence level by the employer. Although she believes at this stage that moral regeneration through education is of prime necessity for the worker, she is beginning to comprehend the economic reality behind class differences:

Le malheur de la classe pauvre provient, en première ligne, de son manque d'instruction morale et souvent professionnelle, mais surtout de la facilité laissée aux maîtres de fixer les prix du travail, et de la difficulté qu'éprouvent les ouvriers à les faire augmenter. - Cependant l'insuffisance du taux moyen de ces salaires, pour que les hommes puissent soutenir leurs familles, est une chose démontrée. *Méphis* T.1 p.229

The worker is seen as a man with a family to support. There is no mention of differences between men and women workers in the novel, an omission later rectified in Flora Tristan's *Tour de France*. As an isolated individual, the worker is exploited by a hard master who pays him subsistence wages with no guarantee of job security and no pay for the days he does not work through sickness, unemployment or holidays.

Méphis asks himself if indeed the "peuple" really benefited from "l'affranchissement", that is, the end of the feudal system where the master was responsible for feeding his serfs. He protests that indirect taxes are as much a burden as the old feudal obligations were. Perhaps there is no one to beat him, but there is no one to feed him either:

Il est vrai qu'il n'a plus de maître ou seigneur qui lui fasse à discrétion donner la bastonnade, mais en revanche on le taxe sans ménagement ; il ne boit pas une bouteille de vin, ne brûle pas un cotret sans acquitter des droits énormes. ... s'il n'a plus de maître qui le batte, il manque

souvent d'un maître qui lui donne du pain. *Néphis* T.1  
p.227

Again, comparing the new economic order with the previous one in terms of rights, Flora Tristan considers the worker is much worse off. She considers the political gains from the French Revolution irrelevant to the material conditions of the proletariat. I will show later that in her development as a socialist, the question of rights is reformulated to include the right to work. In her novel she can only regret the lost advantages of the previous economic system for the worker because the new order is so much more brutal. However, because she is concerned here with the moral consequences of selfishness and greed, she sees exploitation as a result of the moral corruption of society rather than as a key factor for profit in an economic system. Nevertheless, she gradually learns more about the new economic system, and as with women's oppression, she at least recognises that the law and the whole structure of society operates on behalf of those with economic power. She quotes Lammenais to this effect at the beginning of a chapter:

Les prolétaires, ainsi qu'on les nomme avec un superbe dédain, affranchis individuellement, ont été, en masse, la propriété de ceux qui règlent les relations entre les membres de la société, le mouvement de l'industrie, les conditions du travail, son prix et la repartition des fruits. Ce qu'il leur a plu d'ordonner, on l'a nommé *loi*, et les lois n'ont été pour la plupart, que des mesures d'intérêt privé, des moyens d'augmentation et de perpétuer la domination du petit nombre sur le plus grand. *Néphis*  
T.1 p.82

Basically, Flora Tristan's class analysis in the novel has two main weaknesses. Firstly, the role of class conflict does not manifest

itself; despite her awareness of the change of power from the feudal system to the capitalist one, the dialectic is not followed up by opposing the new bourgeoisie to the proletariat. Rather, Flora Tristan expects the two classes, despite their disparities, despite the power of the one over the other, to fuse into one force of "*l'humanité*". In the novel, moral issues always take precedence over economic ones. At this stage, therefore, she is not concerned with a possibility of the worker reacting to protect himself from economic exploitation by demanding higher wages and improvements in living conditions, nor is she expecting the workers to react positively to their misery in any social or political sense. Rather, she sees the evil consequences of capitalism as part of a general corruption of the noble sentiment by society. To some extent this analysis is a socialist one in that she wants a change in the structure of society to suit the people rather than conversely. But her call for moral regeneration remains a psychological solution for the proletariat and for women, that is, a change in attitudes rather than institutions.

The second weakness of her class analysis is that although she had a message for each class, she expected the upper classes to take the lead, and therefore she depended on the power of persuasion and enlightenment, and expected that power to be stronger than class interest. She therefore underestimated the power of class interests in her novel. The more she came to realise the strengths of class interests, the less she tried to depend on enlightened members of the upper classes. But this realisation was confined to a later stage. In

the novel, what is presented is essentially a critique of the moral values of the new order of capitalism.

In her dismissal of the materialism of capitalism, Flora Tristan sometimes betrays her aristocratic pretensions, despising the new wealthy classes and their basis of power, money. This reaction is expressed by suggesting a new morality which will bring back honour to society and provide a driving force for progress. But this suggestion indicates that Flora Tristan failed to understand that capitalism had a driving force of its own which demanded the maintenance of the privileged position of one class over another.

### (3) CONCLUSION

To sum up, I would suggest that Flora Tristan's economic naïvety in the novel *Méphis* affects the presentation of her message. She was confused about the reality of the role of the upper classes and was therefore confused about their economic position. Méphis acquires a fortune and then preaches to the working class. An exemplary businessman preaching to the lower classes could hardly affect the level of wages of the whole of the working class without personal financial ruin. Preaching a new morality without guarantee of economic change could not improve society.

By presenting a solution to class differences in the form of a new moral inspiration, Flora Tristan remains at the level of utopianism,



expecting her romantic vision to become reality purely by the powers of persuasion. No mass organisation is here mentioned. Action is by an individual from the upper classes preaching down. The redeeming factor is that whatever the weaknesses of her utopian message and her class analysis, one thing is sure: she has begun the task of linking two sets of people: women and the proletariat.

Que la défense des opprimés soit l'objet de son existence.  
*Néphis* T.2 p.293

is the message to the daughter of "*le prolétaire*" and "*la femme guide*" (*Néphis* and *Maréquita*). Thus feminism and socialism are inextricably linked through their association with the victims of oppression. Both women and the proletariat are seen to be denied the benefits of the French Revolution and the egalitarian principle:

... appeler des myriades de parias et de prolétaires à la participation des joies de la vie; - et nous bénirons Dieu, car les temps seront venus, et les paroles de liberté et d'égalité cesseront d'être de vain sons. *Néphis*  
T.2 p.293

Both feminist and socialist messages are to be proclaimed in the same way, through revelation. This romantic vision was to fade once Flora Tristan realised the limitations of the use of the novel and once she developed her skills as a social investigator. The romantic dream became transformed into a practical reality during the course of writing *Promenades dans Londres*.

### Footnotes to Chapter Three

- 1 See S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism; the Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', p.30
- 2 See Marguerite Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme français de 1830 à 1850, pp.290-291
- 3 In order to distinguish Flora Tristan's idea from the Saint-Simonian one I shall refer to "la femme guide" and "la femme messie" respectively.
- 4 Claire Goldberg-Moses, 'Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s' France' in Journal of Modern History, pp.240-267 (p.243)
- 5 Claire Goldberg-Moses, 'Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women', p.243
- 6 Claire Goldberg-Moses, 'Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women', p.246
- 7 See Claire Goldberg-Moses, 'Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women', pp.249-250
- 8 Leslie F. Goldstein, 'Early feminist themes in French Utopian Socialism: The Saint-Simoniens and Fourier' in Journal of History of Ideas, vol.XVIII, no.1 (January to March 1982) p.96
- 9 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée, p.161
- 10 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée, pp.163-164
- 11 Flora Tristan was not at all familiar with the rural world. Michelle Perrot discusses her geographical perspective in 'Flora Tristan: enquêtrice' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, pp.82-95 (listed under 'ACTES')

## Chapter Four

### PROMENADES DANS LONDRES: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

#### (1) STYLE OF PROMENADES DANS LONDRES

##### (a) From Vision to Reality

The title of this section is intended to indicate the change of mood and style from Néphis of 1838 to Promenades dans Londres of 1840. It is important to recognise the transformation of genre from the imaginary world to the real one. We have stated that Flora Tristan wished to convey a revolutionary message in her novel Néphis, but by the time she had finished this work, she realised the limitations of depicting that message through imagery, and the ineffectiveness of literary works in promoting social change. She recognised that the success of writing a novel with a social message depended on the naïve hope that the attraction of the ideas would suffice in achieving change. This was well nigh impossible if only because the readership would cover only a small section of the bourgeoisie:

La diffusion d'un roman est en soi limitée, et, parmi les lecteurs, seule la fraction libérale de la bourgeoisie pouvait être touchée par le but social qu'elle s'était proposé.(1)

She also rejected the novel as too abstract and removed from the grim reality of the poverty of the lower classes. Indeed, she put into Méphis' words the irrelevance of Art in the lives of the lower classes:

... quand le peuple est sans pain, et sans nulle instruction qui lui serve , quand il est livré aux vices , au désespoir et , en définitive , au bourreau, irais-je lui faire de l'enseignement par la peinture! Méphis T.1 pp.212-213

Instead of continuing to produce "*oeuvres d'imagination*" (indeed, a novel entitled Les Filles de Lima promised to the readers of Les Pérégrinations d'une Paria never materialised) based on her personal experiences, Flora Tristan used these experiences to embark upon a formal study of social reality. She produced a journalistic account of observations made during the several trips to London between 1828 and 1831 and between 1835 and 1840. The result was one of her best received books, Promenades dans Londres.

The form of this work consists of a series of short sketches on various topics. As Dijkstra suggests, because she was still unsure of the best form of analysis to use, this travelogue was a useful genre in that it contained travel tales, political treatise and social investigation all rolled into one.(2) However, even in this so called study of reality, impartiality of opinion is not maintained. Despite the initial stance of foreign observer, and despite her anxiety to have her work accepted as a serious social study, there is a personal message which gradually unfolds, exemplified in the dedication to the working class in the 1842 edition:

Travailleurs, c'est à vous, *tous et toutes*, que je dédie mon livre ; c'est pour vous instruire sur votre position que je l'ai écrit : donc il vous appartient. Promenades dans Londres p.47

What is clear is that Flora Tristan was anxious, in her study of "society", to get as close as possible to her sources. Because she was intent on having her work accepted as a didactic piece of writing, she needed credibility. This entailed close contact with the world of the aristocracy, the proletariat and the lumpen proletariat.

Her vivid personal descriptions and experiences are given weight by her use of quotations and references to contemporary sociological sources.

Like Néphis, Promenades dans Londres contained a message. The form, however, of this work was as far removed as she could get from the novel. Although in Promenades dans Londres there were still references to the importance of Art, Flora Tristan had come to the conclusion that society itself needed to be transformed before true Art could be created and appreciated:

L'Art ne fait de progrès chez un peuple que lorsqu'il [l'artiste] est descendu dans toutes les classes de citoyens ... Promenades dans Londres p.296

Society must be transformed before everyone had access to Art. Flora Tristan discovered the distance between Art - the novel, music, painting, for instance - as a universal abstract, and the reality in class terms. One class, the privileged one alone, had access to it.

Universality, like equality, might exist in theory, but reality decreed otherwise.

This discovery of a set of values and behaviour, proclaimed as universal, but used to maintain privilege, was an important one for Flora Tristan, but was not the central idea discovered in *Néphis*. What she also discovered in that novel were the limitations of the outlets for her attempts to achieve social change. If she did reject a form of Art, "*le souffle de Dieu*", as a possible means of bringing about social change, what could be substituted? Direct political action was severely controlled under the July Monarchy and was even more closed to a woman. If she were to undertake a wholesale condemnation of French society, the work might never reach the printing press. By contrast, condemnation of English society, at worst, could be taken for an attack on France's old enemy and would not risk the wrath of the censors. Furthermore, the practice of observation came more easily to her than writing fiction; she had already written in a similar style about her impressions of Peru, another foreign country.

In rejecting the novel form, Flora Tristan also rejected her solution therein to end exploitation and oppression, that of mystic or messianic feminism. This, she decided, led nowhere. Unlike the male Saint-Simonians, but learning from the females, Flora Tristan refused to await the arrival of her "*femme-guide*". She was impatient to discover another outlet for action, yet she did not look towards a uniquely pragmatic feminist campaign for changes in the law to improve the condition of women. The limited demands for divorce reform had failed

(it was not until the 1880s that divorce was restored to the statute book in France) and the beginnings of the autonomous feminist movement which occurred while Flora Tristan was in Peru (1832 to 1834) also came to nothing.(3) It was therefore beyond the boundaries of literature and beyond the boundaries of political activity that Flora Tristan explored.

As a concluding remark on the comparison of *Néphis* and *Promenades dans Londres*, it must be said that in both, Flora Tristan was convinced that the existing organisation of society had a dehumanising effect and that workers and women were pariahs. In *Promenades dans Londres* however, she was determined to show that it was the exploitative social and economic institutions of an advanced industrial nation which reduced people to this state of nullity. Her desire to establish a world of equality and love through the peaceful transformation of decadent society was founded upon a considered analysis of this existing system. Flora Tristan had abandoned visionary feminism in order to portray reality, the reality of the shocking effects of capitalism upon human beings.

Before discussing the development of her feminist and socialist critiques in *Promenades dans Londres*, it is vital to understand the limitations of Flora Tristan's interpretation, be they historical or otherwise. Therefore, in the second section, I shall discuss this idiosyncratic perception in terms of her anglophobia and her distorted analysis of social class in England.

## (b) Anglophobia and Class Distortions

As has already been indicated, Promenades dans Londres is a critical study. Flora Tristan's status as a foreigner strengthened her position as a critical observer; as an outsider she could go beyond the barriers of respectability and the accepted English ideology. However, she did allow herself to be carried into a degree of anglophobia. Indeed, throughout the work, customs and habits of England are so constantly belittled and scorned while anything French is treated with so much approval that her anglophobia often reaches ludicrous proportions:

Les Anglais sont si vantards et prônent l'Angleterre et ses usages en tant de pays que, pour le confort de la vie, il est passé en force de chose jugée que l'Angleterre est le séjour par excellence ! Cette réputation, des milliers de respectables *gentlemen* l'affirment tous les jours formellement à toutes les tables d'hôte et dans tous les cafés et cabarets de France, d'Allemagne, de Suisse et d'Italie. Il faut croire qu'ils ont quitté l'Angleterre pour se *mortifier*, et non parce qu'ils se trouvent mieux sur le continent ... Promenades dans Londres p.285

This somewhat contradicts Flora Tristan's internationalist notions expressed in earlier works. For instance in Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères she stated:

Les limites de notre amour ne doivent pas être les buissons qui entourent notre jardin , les murs qui enserment notre ville, les montagnes ou les mers qui bordent notre pays. Désormais notre *patrie* doit être l'univers. Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères p.25

The strength of her anglophobia was such that Flora Tristan found the country a very unattractive place to live in, from the point of view



of climate: "*à Londres on respire la tristesse*"; social habits: "*en Angleterre la femme et la fille de l'ouvrier ne prennent aucun plaisir*" and character: "*les Anglais ont le travers de croire aptes à tout se l'on en juge d'après l'universalité de leurs politiciens.*"(4)

Bédarida tries to explain away her anglophobia by suggesting that it was a counter-attack on English insularity and animosity towards the French. We must remember that at the time of her writing (between 1839 and 1840) there was confrontation between the two governments over the Eastern Question, and the Napoleonic wars had marked the end of a long saga of sporadic warfare, although England had been one of the first countries to resume diplomatic relations after France's isolation during the Restoration period. Feelings between the two countries were always inclined to run high with anglomania being as widespread as anglophobia:

La France rurale n'en finit pas d'être fasciné par cette Angleterre industrielle qui lui tend le miroir de son propre avenir.(5)

Lacassagne points out that Flora Tristan was fascinated, as was Barbier, author of the poem *Lazare*, by the horror and luxury of London, "*la ville monstre*", the title of her first sketch in the book:

Terre de contrastes, l'Angleterre ne peut laisser indifférent. Londres, sa capitale, ville faite de plusieurs villes, comme le relève Tristan, épouvante par sa prodigieuse extension, stupéfiée par son activité, indigne par le voisinage de la plus voyante richesse et de la plus affreuse pauvreté, consterne par son climat.(6)

The intention of Flora Tristan was to go beyond appearances and to look for the causes of, and remedies to, poverty. Because England had a reputation as a powerful world force and as a stable political system, Flora Tristan was determined to show that this powerful country had many faults, the main one being the appalling contrast between rich and poor. However, everything was judged, it would seem, in terms of her anglophobic impressions. This caused a good deal of misinterpretation of the message itself when Promenades dans Londres was first published. Not surprisingly, it was not welcomed in London, not even in radical or in Chartist circles. According to Bédarida, only the Owenites paid any attention to it.(7) For this reason, several modifications to the 1840 edition were made by Flora Tristan to remove the impression that the book was merely a diatribe against France's former enemy.

Flora Tristan's intentions in writing the book were twofold; firstly, she wanted to reveal what she saw as the hypocrisy of a nation upheld as the seat of all virtues and the haven of constitutional liberties:

N'est elle pas vraiment d'un orgueil ridicule, cette société anglaise qui prétend imposer partout ses principes de liberté ! Promenades dans Londres p.104

The French had undergone several changes of régime and believed that their neighbour had suffered less from the abuse of power of aristocratic and ecclesiastical privilege. After all, a constitutional monarchy had been established in England in 1688. Flora Tristan wished to show that despite its grandeur and reputation, the English political system was seriously flawed. Secondly, Flora Tristan recognised that

France was undergoing similar economic changes and could therefore end up with similar social problems. Her book was a warning to the French not to make the same mistakes in response to these problems:

J'ai signalé les vices du système anglais, afin que sur le continent on s'applique à les éviter ... Promenades dans Londres p.62

This second intention was often neglected or ignored by her readers, with the result that the book was easily interpreted at face value only as a critique of English society, rather than a systematic social treatise.

During the course of her study of the English way of life, Flora Tristan's belief in the superiority of the French system stands out. She believed one of the main elements of the superiority of France was its capacity for revolution. For Flora Tristan, the revolution of 1789 had abolished the feudal dominion of king, nobles and clergy at a single stroke, whereas in England the aristocracy and landed gentry between them still owned four-fifths of the land.(8) Important conclusions follow from this comparison. One is that for Flora Tristan, the French Revolution was a constant reminder that sudden change was possible. Corrupt systems could be overthrown by political will:

Croyez-vous que, si le peuple anglais avait été élevé dans les principes de liberté et d'égalité, s'il avait appris à considérer que la résistance à l'oppression est non seulement le *droit naturel* de l'homme, mais que, bien plus, lorsque le peuple est opprimé, l'insurrection devient un *devoir sacré* ... Promenades dans Londres p.50

However, she recognised that the violent political upheavals which occurred after 1789 did so without any impact on the social and economic order. Flora Tristan, like the Saint-Simonians, recognised that to look for change in a whole society, it was necessary to go beyond the political affairs of the ballot box and assemblies. But this belief in the potential of revolutionary forces contrasted sharply with her fear of causing social upheaval. Like many intellectuals, the idea of dramatic change appealed to her in theory but not in its practical implication of violence and social unrest. She was convinced, however, that hunger drives people to rebellion. And she claimed that the masses in France were more dignified than their English counterparts as they would surely prefer to die fighting than to starve in submission. She used the example of the Lyon textile workers' uprising of 1831 to illustrate the French refusal of exploitation:

... Ah ! plutôt à Dieu que les ouvriers de l'Angleterre imitassent la sublime résolution de leurs frères de Lyon.  
Promenades dans Londres p.50

However, Flora Tristan's ignorance of working class conditions both in England and in France has been pointed out by writers. Bédarida suggests two works which reveal the depth of her ignorance of early English working class resistance to oppression, namely Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England and Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class. As we will see in Chapter Six, during her tour of France, Flora Tristan herself came to realise that the superiority of the French over the English workers in resisting oppression was untrue.

The next most idiosyncratic feature of Promenades dans Londres is the class analysis of English society drawn by Flora Tristan in terms of class conflict. In this work it is clear that Flora Tristan was highly class-conscious.

However, at times, her class analysis is prejudiced and distorted. Dijkstra explains it in terms of the fact that Flora Tristan was getting her revenge on the aristocratic and bourgeois classes who had rejected her. This interpretation is rather facile when we consider that a further conflict lies in the fact that the most likely people to read this work would emanate from the educated classes, in other words, the same classes whose achievements Flora Tristan is constantly belittling. While she does mention the wonders of the capitalist age - she admires the fine houses and street lighting - on the whole, her tone is disparaging, more particularly in the case of the bourgeoisie. The visit to the Houses of Parliament attests to this. The House of Commons is referred to thus:

L'aspect de la salle est ce qu'il y a de plus mesquin, de plus bourgeois, de plus boutiquier ... Promenades dans Londres p.106

If she was declaring the corruption of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie to be in every sphere of society then how could she expect them to welcome her condemnations? It was not for reasons of conflict of loyalty that distortions occur, it is more likely for reasons of sociological comprehension.

Flora Tristan's class analysis of English society was also sometimes inaccurate. For example, she laid great stress on the differences of the behaviour and dress of the two houses of parliament, whereas as Bédarida points out,(9) there was not a great deal of difference between the two in those respects:

Messieurs les lords n'ont plus de tenue que les membres de la Chambre des Communes : ils gardent aussi le chapeau sur la tête ; mais là ce n'est pas vulgarité de manières, c'est orgueil de rang, et ils exigent que les assistants, dans les tribunes publiques, ou les personnes citées à leur barre, fussent-elles des membres de l'autre Chambre, soient découverts. Promenades dans Londres p.109

And Flora Tristan herself occasionally seems to acknowledge this. For instance, although she was convinced that the members of the House of Lords had better manners, this did not prevent her from giving a hilarious description of Lord Wellington's posture upon resuming his seat after making a speech:

Après que Lord Wellington eut fini de parler, il s'étendit sur son banc dans la position que vulgairement on nomme *les quatre fers en l'air*, c'est-à-dire que ses jambes reposaient sur le dos du banc supérieur, ce qui lui mettait la tête en bas ; cette posture était des plus grotesques. Promenades dans Londres p.109

One may also question the accuracy of Flora Tristan's analysis of the working class in England. Criticism has been voiced, for instance, in relation to her views on prostitution. In an essay entitled Flora, Pauline et les autres, Laure Adler highlights the distance between Flora Tristan and the prostitute, which she claims could have been eliminated had she gone to their assistance in some sort of practical way as did a

contemporary of hers, Suzanne Voilquin, who was a midwife and provided this service benevolently to prostitutes:

Mais contrairement à des femmes qui ... prônaient l'alliance avec les prostituées, proposaient d'aller les aider et proclamaient que prolétaires, bourgeoisies et prostituées étaient toutes soeurs en l'humanité, Flora prendra un ton qu'on appellerait aujourd'hui distancié.(10)

Adler claims that Flora Tristan's aloofness does not limit itself to prostitutes, but is extended to the English proletariat as a whole. Although she wishes to describe the victims of the excesses of wealth and the corruption of capitalism and includes them in the universal order, despite herself, she is not and never can be one of them. For instance, in her description of the slums of London, she devotes almost as much space to expressing her own physical revulsion as she does to the misery of the slum inhabitants:

J'hésitai si je continuerais à m'avancer dans le quartier des Irlandais, lorsque tout à coup je me rappelai que c'était au milieu d'êtres humains, au milieu de mes frères que je me trouvais, de mes frères qui souffraient depuis des siècles, et en silence, l'agonie qui accablait ma faiblesse, quoique je ne l'éprouvasse que depuis dix minutes ! Promenades dans Londres p.192

Or in referring for instance to the participants of the orgies in the finishing houses(11) she claims she cannot even describe them:

La plume se refuse à tracer les égarements, les turpitudes dans lesquelles se laissent entraîner les hommes blasés, qui m'ont que des sens et dont l'âme est inerte, le coeur flétri, l'esprit sans culture. Promenades dans Londres p.134

Dijkstra also points out Flora Tristan's ignorance of the French working classes. This may be partly excused on the grounds that France had a smaller proletariat than did England - something recognised perhaps unconsciously by Flora Tristan in undertaking such a study of England before that of France. Indeed, she was only able to conduct a study of the French working class conditions after her "apprenticeship" in London. Despite her repulsion and aloofness, however, Flora Tristan sincerely attempted to identify with the pariahs of capitalism, and by the end of her journey dedicated her second edition to the working classes. What she had experienced in the course of writing the book was that her allegiance was to them.

## (2) FEMINISM IN PROMENADES DANS LONDRES

The major feature of Promenades dans Londres is undoubtedly Flora Tristan's feminism. The evolution of her feminism contains, in essence, the story of her development from the egalitarian protests of an aristocratic impoverished woman to a mature analysis of capitalism and the role of women within that system.

We have seen that in the early stages of her political development, Flora Tristan used the democratic and radical egalitarian argument to demand the emancipation of women. During her short career as a novelist, Flora Tristan flirted with the notion of "*la femme guide*" as an inspiration for change. This could be termed "mystic" or "visionary" feminism. However, the realisation, that no legal or political changes



in women's position would substantially alter women's status without eliminating the underlying sources of inequality - private property and the patriarchal family - dawned on Flora Tristan during her study of women in Promenades dans Londres. No longer did she demand social equality on the basis of abstract natural rights. By demonstrating the direct link between oppression and the economic structure of society, she acknowledged a far more concrete and revolutionary concept of equality based on the elimination of the material and ideological sources of social hierarchy. In this way an ideological link between socialism and feminism was forged. Moreover, feminism became only part of Flora Tristan's wider overall view of society. In her development, socialism was gradually to become the overriding force, since the discovery of the link between female oppression and the specific economic structure of capitalism awakened a concern in her mind for the oppressed as a whole, and no longer simply for women. Yet feminism was not negated or eliminated. It simply receded in significance. Thus Flora Tristan avoided the potential areas of conflict which were to continue to dominate the feminist scene: for example, women's place in the workforce and self-determination for women. In Flora Tristan's system of values, socialism was prior to feminism. Accordingly, she refused to become involved with any women's group campaigning for what were termed bourgeois rights because she now saw that the greatest single evil to be attacked was the poverty and misery of the working class. However, socialism, as we shall see, in Flora Tristan's opinion, could not be complete without feminism. It can be said that Promenades dans Londres is the first work by Flora Tristan wherein feminism falls into place within a socialist analysis.

(a) *'Filles Publiques'*

In *Promenades dans Londres*, women are studied within the context of modern capitalism. Flora Tristan's feminism is not solely a moral demand for egalitarian treatment, nor is it dominated by an idealisation of woman's role as was the case in *Néphis*. It is a social observation and analysis of the oppression of women in the context of the capitalist system, although ethical ideals are still clearly present. Taking introductions and appendix into account, there are twenty-nine sections or sketches; of these, two are devoted entirely to women. Among the remaining sections, further allusion to women is made, especially in the visit to the Houses of Parliament, prisons and slums. Although this is an all-encompassing survey of society, the feminist perception is conspicuously present. For the purpose of social regeneration, Flora Tristan had moved beyond the limitations of messianic feminism - socialism was to become her new perspective. But this did not entail a rejection of feminism; rather, the socialist perspective entailed feminism. Feminism was implicit, if not always explicit, in Flora Tristan's socialism. She had realised the limitations of feminism pursued in isolation, but wanted her feminism included in a more general reform of society.

The question arises, however, as to how far Flora Tristan's feminism succeeded in forging links between feminism and the broader perspective of socialism. Much of this section will examine this question, mainly in relation to the two chapters which are wholly devoted to women in *Promenades dans Londres*.

The first such chapter is entitled '*Filles publiques*'. It follows a chapter on the factory workers' miserable existence which in turn comes after the section on politics and power. It precedes the sections on prisons, hospitals and madhouses. Simply from the order in which the sketches appear, the power of imagery is cleverly used by Flora Tristan to contrast the behaviour of male politicians at the centre of power and the treatment of prostitutes in the debauchery of the finishing houses by members of the same social class. Prostitution is also deliberately positioned, I am sure, at the start of a series of sketches on social problems of crime, illness and poverty, thus associating it with social oppression rather than with individual sin. Leading up to the talk on prostitution, two important references are made to women which prepare the reader psychologically. The first reference is to the House of Commons as the apex of male aristocratic and bourgeois power refusing entry to women, even to the visitors' gallery:

... non seulement les lois et les préjugés font peser sur les femmes le plus atroce esclavage, mais encore la Chambre des Communes, elle qui prétend représenter la nation entière, sinon réellement, d'une manière fictive, cette assemblée qui reçoit à genoux les ordres d'une reine pousse l'inconséquence jusqu'à refuser aux femmes le droit d'assister à ses séances. Promenades dans Londres p.103

This is the same parliament which is revered throughout the world as a venerable model of liberty and constitutional democracy. Flora Tristan denounced the reputation of liberty which the Mother of Parliaments held; it was only skin deep because women were excluded:

Dans ce pays si libre, s'il faut ajouter quelque valeur aux bavardages parlementaires et aux phrases des journalistes, dans ce pays qui se dit libre, la moitié de la nation n'est pas seulement privée des droits civils et

politiques, elle est de plus, en diverses circonstances, traitée en esclave : la femme peut être vendue sur le marché, et l'Assemblée législative lui refuse l'entrée dans son sein. *Promenades dans Londres* p.104

The second reference is to working class family life. In *'Ouvriers des manufactures'*, the chapter preceding *'Filles publiques'*, women are mentioned as an element in factory workers' lives. Interestingly, Flora Tristan devotes little space to working women, perhaps reflecting her view that for a woman, work was the last resort. She illustrates how the wife and children depend on a worker's low wages; without his support they die, or are condemned to the workhouse. Instead of finding women serving as a comfort to men to help them recover from their arduous work, Flora Tristan is outraged at the total deprivation of a comfortable family life:

Je m'étonnais de ne voir arriver aucune femme. Mon Dieu ! pensais-je, ces ouvriers sont-ils donc sans mère, sans soeur, n'ont-ils ni femme ni fille attendant, à la porte, leur sortie de l'ardente fournaise, afin de les laver à l'eau tiède, de les envelopper dans des chemises de flanelle, de leur faire prendre un breuvage nourrissant, fortifiant, puis de leur dire quelques paroles d'amitié, qui encouragent et aident l'homme à supporter les plus cruelles misères ? *Promenades dans Londres* p.120

The ideal role of working class woman is thus depicted as wife and mother. But the reality was far different. While men are being exploited ruthlessly, their wives are neither at home nor at work but are being exploited in even more savage ways. Instead of performing the above mentioned role as model wives or daughters, mothers or sisters, women are condemned to prostitution.

The horror and shame of prostitution deeply affected Flora Tristan:

La fille publique est pour moi un impénétrable mystère ...  
Je vois dans la prostitution une folie affreuse, ou elle  
est tellement sublime que mon être *humain* n'en peut avoir  
conscience. Promenades dans Londres p.123

Flora Tristan gave evidence of the lack of public concern over this matter; very few laws existed to penalise those in charge of brothels, for example. The hypocrisy of the English upper classes is illustrated thus:

En dépit du masque d'hypocrisie que continuent à porter les personnes des hautes classes, dans le but d'entretenir le fanatisme parmi le peuple, elles ne sont guère montrées disposées à seconder les efforts de la *Société pour prévenir la prostitution de l'enfance* ; tandis que depuis trente sept ans qu'existe la *Société pour la suppression du vice*, qui s'attache seulement à poursuivre les personnes n'observant pas le dimanche, ou les vendeurs de *publications obscènes et les diseurs de bonne aventure*, il est à remarquer que cette Société a rencontré constamment aide et appui partout, parce qu'on peut très bien dormir, le dimanche, aux sermons des révérends, renoncer aux peintures de l'Arétin et garder ses vices ... Promenades dans Londres p.140

The reader is presented with estimates of the extent of prostitution in London which by far exceeded the scope of the methods and aims of the voluntary societies attempting to eradicate this scourge. Just as she analysed the cause of prostitution in economic and social terms, Flora Tristan saw a solution on the same scale:

Et on peut affirmer que, jusqu'à ce que l'émancipation de la femme ait lieu, la prostitution ira toujours croissant.  
Promenades dans Londres p.125

Flora Tristan began her analysis of prostitution in England by making a revolutionary statement for her time. She declared that prostitution was not a crime where the individual was at fault, but that society was to blame:

La prostitution est la plus hideuse des plaies que produit  
l'inégale répartition des biens dans ce monde ...  
Promenades dans Londres p.124

Why is such a stand revolutionary? Because it advanced a theory of economic determinism which undermined the prevailing ethic of individual responsibility. She linked this worst form of women's exploitation with the unequal distribution of wealth. It was the economic system, and not the inherent evil or weakness of human nature, that produced the social evil of prostitution. Flora Tristan argued her case by demonstrating the inadequacies of existing attempts to deal with the problem. For this reason there is moral condemnation of English society, as well as an economic analysis of this form of oppression.

There is no point in decrying the lack of virtue among women, Flora Tristan insists, when they own, and are entitled to, nothing:

... quelle peut être la morale de la femme qui ne s'appartaient pas, qui n'a rien en propre, et qui, toute sa vie, a été habituée à se soustraire à l'arbitraire par la ruse, à la contrainte par la séduction ? Promenades dans Londres p.125

Inequality of the sexes is woven into the pattern of inequality of wealth, which is exemplified in the English economic system:

Les richesses sont plus inégalement réparties en Angleterre que nulle autre part ; la prostitution y doit donc être plus considérable. Promenades dans Londres p.125

The legal system compounded these inequalities - for instance, by denying women the right to inherit property. This made an independent income for women rare, all the more so since few job opportunities existed for women:

Tant qu'elle ne peut obtenir la jouissance des biens que par l'influence qu'elle exerce sur les passions, qu'il n'y a pas de titre pour elle et qu'elle est dépouillée par son mari des propriétés qu'elle a acquises par son travail ou que son père lui a données, qu'elle ne peut s'assurer l'usage des biens et de la liberté qu'en vivant dans le célibat, il ne saurait exister de loi morale pour elle !  
Promenades dans Londres p.125

Hence, being a kept woman was often the only alternative to starvation.

Flora Tristan also draws attention to a form of prostitution built into the very functioning of the economic system. Seduced women have to leave home; employers in factories often seduce female employees. Whichever way they turn, the working class is exposed to the whims of the upper classes:

Ah ! que ces capitalistes, que ces propriétaires du sol, que les prolétaires rendent si riches par l'échange de quatorze heures de travail contre un morceau de pain, sont loin de balancer, par l'usage qu'ils font de leur fortune, les maux et désordres de tous genres qui résultent de l'accumulation des richesses dans leurs mains !  
Promenades dans Londres p.126

Flora Tristan thus explains prostitution as a direct consequence of the accumulation of wealth. Instead of being upright citizens who reward their workers with a decent wage, men from the upper classes squander their profits on debauchery. They seek pleasure outside their family and in doing so exploit women from two classes, their neglected wives by imposing on them a different standard of morality, and the working class women who are forced into prostitution by poverty. As long as women have no independence they remain prisoners of this oppression:

Tant qu'elle est soumise au joug de l'homme ou du préjugé, qu'elle ne reçoit point d'éducation professionnelle, qu'elle est privée de ses droits civils, il ne saurait exister de loi morale pour elle ! Promenades dans Londres p.125

Prostitution is analysed, not only within the context of the accumulation of capitalism by surplus labour of the working class, but also in feminist terms: it is the result of the double standard of morality whereby chastity before marriage, fidelity, and total economic dependence are the norm for upper class women's lives. At first glance, many forms of oppression of women from the upper classes - for instance, legal restrictions of property rights - have little to do with the economic exploitation of the working class, but Flora Tristan's analysis combines both forms of oppression. Her feminist explanation tries to group women from the upper classes and the working class.

Women, like the working class, are dependent on the job market for their living. In their case, a kept woman, either within or outside of



marriage, is a more attractive alternative to starvation, but this is simply another form of oppression.

Prostitution, therefore, becomes the pivot which links a feminist and socialist analysis of exploitation. In trying to include middle and upper class female grievances in her chapter on prostitution, Flora Tristan succeeded in boosting her feminist analysis, applying it to women of all classes, and at the same time demonstrated that prostitution was one way in a whole series that the working class was exploited, thus illustrating the nature of domination by one class over another.

Although the probability of women inheriting or having a dowry was the lot of the upper classes, by introducing these instruments of oppression, Flora Tristan was challenging women in other classes to extend solidarity with the working classes, as she herself was trying to do. For this reason, she devoted a second sketch to an analysis of the exploitation of upper class women in English society.

(b) *'Les Femmes Anglaises'*

The two sketches on women in Promenades dans Londres are placed far apart in the book, which symbolises the physical separation between the two "types" of women. It must be said here that Flora Tristan is guilty of over-simplification of the class structure in this work. To

all intents and purposes, in particular in the analysis of women, there are just two classes, the proletariat:

... pauvre peuple, qui n'es compté pour rien, avec quelle inhumanité on te traite ! Promenades dans Londres p.253

and the wealthy classes:

L'aristocratie, qui a, pour *prendre l'air*, ses magnifiques parcs, ses vastes terres et tout le continent, où elle va dépenser l'argent que lui gagne le peuple ... Promenades dans Londres p.253

Although evidence of this over-simplification occurs throughout the book, nowhere is it more obvious than in her treatment of women, although it is not something Flora Tristan herself qualifies. She simply ignores or fails to mention women who undertake paid work outside the home. Nor does she make any distinction between lower middle class and upper middle class women. Their common bond is their servitude in marriage and total economic dependence on the male members of their class. Whether or not the over-simplification is deliberate is not clear. What is clear is that it accentuates the extreme form of working class women's oppression and it dilutes areas of possible conflict between different groups of women. Flora Tristan believed solidarity between upper class women and the working classes was possible, and she wished to demonstrate the similarities of their position. This is why she conveniently ignored female workers. In Néphis, Flora Tristan had similarly idealised two types of women. The proletarian woman was supreme because of her tolerance of her

oppression, and the aristocratic heroine was the very essence of perfection in beauty and culture.

In Promenades dans Londres, although her admiration for the ideal type of upper class woman remains, through her physical contact with poverty, Flora Tristan has a clearer picture of the life of "*la femme prolétaire*" and sees heroism in the face of starvation and grime; she relishes the defiant beauty of a woman prisoner and the nobility of her motives - she stole to keep her children from starving. Flora Tristan's reaction is to change her class loyalty. What is the point of talking about egalitarian principles when women are driven to crime and prostitution just to keep themselves and their children alive? What is the point of talking about rights of the individual and equality of potential when the factory system renders the struggle to stay alive the chief preoccupation of women in the working class? Flora Tristan cannot, however, reject out of hand all her previous convictions. Rather, she takes a fresh look at the women of the upper classes and, although she repeats some of the points made in Néphis, her perception of their mode of escape from a useless existence is noticeably different.

She mentions the monotony of most upper and middle class English women's lives:

L'existence des Anglaises est tout ce qu'on peut imaginer de plus monotone, de plus aride et de plus triste.  
Promenades dans Londres p.263

But she proclaims at the beginning of the sketch - after a quotation from Fourier on the question of women having souls - that despite their general servitude, some women authors are a shining light:

Quel révoltant contraste en Angleterre que l'extrême servitude des femmes et la supériorité intellectuelle des femmes auteurs ! Promenades dans Londres p.262

Such women succeeded despite, rather than because of, the system of education to which they were subjected. Any education received by upper middle class English girls is useless and unsuitable. She paints a depressing picture of the education of young girls, taught languages which they never use because of their lack of travel opportunities, and music and art, whether or not they have a cultural aptitude for them.

The attention given to the useless education of aristocratic women destroys the image of the heroine Maréquita, the vision of the complete woman. By insinuation, "*la femme guide*" is shattered by Flora Tristan as she demolishes the hypocritical society which requires the teaching of chastity, culture and obedience to young girls in preparation for their particular form of prostitution, marriage:

Le mari anglais est le type du *seigneur et maître* des temps féodaux ; il se croit, et cela de très bonne foi, le droit d'exiger de sa femme l'obéissance passive de l'esclave, la soumission et le respect. Promenades dans Londres p.267

Flora Tristan thus utters a conscious condemnation of the conventional wisdom of the nineteenth century, that the ideal woman was

the perfect wife. Flora Tristan shows that in the upper classes in England, the woman is not an active participant in the family:

Le mari tient l'argent et les clés ; c'est lui qui règle la dépense, loue ou congédie les domestiques, commande le dîner chaque matin ... en un mot il s'occupe exclusivement de tout. Promenades dans Londres p.267

Child care is left to governesses. The woman has no control over the decision-making process involved in the running of her household as this is taken care of by the husband and servants. She is therefore condemned to a dull and effete existence devoting twenty or so years of her life to providing a husband with babies.

The oppression in rich women's lives therefore stems not from poverty but from wealth, and the social conventions associated with wealth, which proscribe any form of personal effectiveness for wealthy women. Upper class women were ornaments rather than persons.

It is thus obvious that Flora Tristan set about analysing capitalism using gender and class as categories. In doing so, she tried to determine the ways in which sex differences systematically cut through society and culture, and in the process determine the form of oppression suffered by women, either drudgery or enforced idleness.

The emphasis upon oppression and the victimisation of women in Promenades dans Londres would lead to repetition of the ideas found in Néphis if it were not for the fact that Flora Tristan now provides an

outlet for action - education of women to enable many more of them to write and thereby advance the cause of feminism.

In *Néphis*, Woman was assumed to have a permanent nature of passion, sweetness, love and peace, which fitted her for the moralising role of Man, assuaging his bestial instincts and tempering his intellectual sterility. There was emphasis on the ideal couple wherein women and men cooperated in roles suited to their distinct but complementary natures, both in the public and private spheres. This image of being equal but different ensured women's equality with men without the risk of competition with them. In *Néphis*, by separating the natures of the two sexes, Flora Tristan avoids the danger of economic competition between the sexes and thereby endowed men with a privileged position of economic superiority over women. Indeed Flora Tristan does not explicitly raise the question of women working until she witnesses women at work during her *Tour de France*. Whilst she develops her ideas on the question of the "nature" of women in *Promenades dans Londres*, their economic role is shelved for the moment.

The economic inferiority of women within the working class was being discussed at the time by the Saint-Simonian women workers, but it must be remembered that Flora Tristan was not in France during the heyday of the activity of the first autonomous working class women's movement.(12) Mainly as a reaction to the excesses of "le père" Enfantin's dictates, several Saint-Simonian women opposed the male domination of the school, and instead of the imposed dictates of a single female messiah, they advocated the self-elevation and association

of women of all classes. Equating the struggle of women with that of all people, they called for "Truth, Union, Freedom for women and by extension freedom for the people through a new organisation of home and industry". Strongly influenced by Fourier and by their own proletarian backgrounds, they argued that Woman's role as a moraliser and educator required not only her domestic equality but her economic independence as an individual, rather than as part of a couple.

But Flora Tristan's solution to the oppression of women was much narrower at this point. She argued that women's oppression was built deep into the social infrastructure of England, and until that was changed, the woman would be a helpless victim. Change would come about by the gradual illumination of minds, brought about in no small part by the writings of well-off women. By praising women writers and thereby giving herself a seal of approval, Flora Tristan provides the suggestion of an outlet for idle "imprisoned" women. She quotes the case of talented English women writers, none of whom except Mary Wollstonecraft used their talents to further the cause of women. It is not without significance therefore that Flora Tristan includes long extracts from Wollstonecraft's book A Vindication of the Rights of Women, lamenting the fact that it is hardly known.

Education would thus rescue women in the upper classes from their meaningless existence. Flora Tristan does not suggest the possibility of any "career" other than that of a writer. For the purpose of her overall argument in Promenades dans Londres, this career is crucial. Firstly, it justifies and endorses her own activities. Secondly, it is a

means by which to publicise oppression, to raise the consciousness of women in modern parlance. This is the nearest Flora Tristan gets to encouraging women to be their own liberators. Thirdly, it could be a means of showing solidarity to women in other classes.

However, Flora Tristan realised that if Mary Wollstonecraft's attempt was so severely attacked and disowned, emancipation of women through decent education and women writer's activities were somewhat optimistic proposals. This was another reason for her turning to socialism.

### (3) DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALIST CRITIQUE IN PROMENADES DANS LONDRES

The most important aspect of Flora Tristan's socialist interpretations is the lesson she draws from her witness of the workings of the advanced capitalist society and from her assessment of the work of its critics. Despite confusion in her class allegiance and the vagueness of her analysis of the class structure of British society, she presents an analysis of capitalism as a system of class conflict founded on economic interests. She presents an analysis of political power which serves to protect the interests of the wealthy classes, but she draws attention to the limitation of élitist political action as a method of change for any revolutionary movement.

The discussion of the strength of repression and the measure of alienation of the masses leads her to conclude that the extent of the



oppression of the working class will determine action by that class to free itself. It is therefore her duty and call to raise the consciousness of the class. In witnessing the attempts to change society from above by Owenites, Chartists and O'Connell, Flora Tristan deduces that along with working class solidarity, education and revolutionary zeal, an organised mass movement with strong leadership is the only effective way forward.

By the time she published the second edition, she was fired with messianic zeal. The reinterpretation of the Saint-Simonian message of universal love was directed towards one class: the working class cause.

In this section, I shall introduce the development of Flora Tristan's socialist critique in *Promenades dans Londres* by discussing the importance of investigative journalism in the early days of the new capitalist era. Then I shall discuss her economic and political analysis of the capitalist system. The third section briefly explains judgement on the Owenites, Chartists and O'Connell and their solutions to society's problems.

The conclusion will show how, as a result of her socialist critique, the feminist intellectual henceforth places her allegiance with the working class as the group to be organised into achieving change. The working class becomes the *raison d'être* and the tool of her militant fervour.

#### (a) The Significance of Investigative Enquiry

In order to appreciate the novelty of Flora Tristan's socialist critique, the introduction to this section describes the character and ideology of the early capitalist era and discusses the importance of investigative journalism.

Engels wrote:

The history of the proletariat in England begins with the second half of the last century, with the invention of the steam engine and of machinery for working cotton. These inventions gave rise, as is well known, to an industrial revolution, a revolution which altered the whole civil society; one, the historical importance of which is only now beginning to be recognised. England is the classic soil of this transformation, which was all the mightier, the more silently it proceeded; and England is, therefore, the classic land of the chief product also, the proletariat. Only in England can the proletariat be studied in all its relations and from all sides.(13)

The new machines mentioned here set a pace of output which reduced to dire penury those who were forced to compete with them by the older methods of handicraft. They flung men out of work by the thousands just as the Enclosure Act drove the hungry to the towns to struggle for jobs at any wage the employers would offer and under any conditions of overwork.

Flora Tristan witnessed exploitation of the working class at its crudest and most relentless stage. Firstly, the length of the working day was stretched to the maximum of human endurance. Secondly, even when trade was good, there was such a plentiful supply of cheap labour

from the countryside and from Ireland that wages were pitched at their lowest; the workers were constantly near starvation level. Thirdly, competition was so stiff that labour was constantly being replaced with machines. As a result:

Even the "good" employer was compelled to grind the faces of the poor; for how else could he survive? The bad, ruthless employer was in a position to drive him out of business if he did not conform. And ruthless employers were many, and well assured of being justified in what they did. Were they not the masters of implements infinitely more productive than any the world had known; and did it not stand to reason that the new methods were better than the old, and ought to be used to the full? If some people suffered that was but a passing trouble, for if they were left free to develop the powers of production by their enterprise, goods would become cheaper and more plentiful and society as a whole was bound to be better off.(14)

As fast as the new forms of production developed, new economic theories were being expounded to justify the harsh system; laws "decreed" what the level, of wages should be:

... free contract was the only rational way of ordering men's economic relationships, and all the workers who laboured in their mills or mines had contracted freely so to labour ... for the hours and at the wages competition caused to prevail. If people suffered this was not the employer's doing, or his fault, and anything which interfered with the free course of production would be certain to make them suffer more.(15)

While Flora Tristan was observing the customs and habits of English society, employers were extolling the virtues of hard work, thrift and God-fearing behaviour, even building churches where the people would be taught to value heaven above material comfort, and to fear hell; the employers were also fighting tooth and nail against trade unionism,

declaring it to be immoral and dangerous. As for state intervention to regulate working hours of adults and children, it was bitterly opposed by people who often professed radical political sentiments but who believed implicitly in the policy of laissez-faire.

The rapid industrialization that occurred in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries changed the relationship between town and country and transformed working conditions and social and family ties. New concepts and new circumstances came into being such as the factory, the suburbs and the slums. While all this was going on, anxiety soon arose over the scale of the consequent poverty and distress. Investigations began to be carried out, at first by philanthropic members of the ruling classes, especially those concerned with social organisation: administrators, economists and doctors; official enquiries were not conducted until much later. These individual investigators, such as Buret, Villermé, Engels and Flora Tristan herself, were concerned with finding the answer to the question of why poverty continues to develop at the same time, place and extent, as wealth. Towns were both the centre for industrial activity and the breeding ground for crime and disease. These evils seemed to be destroying the very fabric of early capitalist society. Indeed, the great fear of the enlightened Tories, something Flora Tristan was not afraid to exploit, was that if a remedy was not found to halt this growth in poverty, then there would be a terrible upheaval, and possibly another revolution. Warnings must be given and alarm bells sounded loud and clear. Members of the upper classes must be exhorted to leave the comfort of the drawing rooms and clubs, to come out from behind the closed doors of the seats

of power, to look and see for themselves. "Describe" and "prescribe" were the watchwords. Investigations began into the conditions of the slums and prisons and movements of protest arose:

No period in British history has been richer in movements for radical and social reform than the decades 1830-1850. The list of only the major movements which flourished in these twenty years is an initial indication of the variety and extent of the efforts to bring about far-reaching changes in British society: political reform, Chartism, trade unionism, factory reform, Owenite socialism, cooperation, anti-poor law agitation, secularism, the struggle for an unstamped press, friendly benefit societies, workers and adult education, temperance, phrenology, vegetarianism, universal peace, the Anti-Corn Law League, anti-state church campaign, millenarianism, machine-breaking and agricultural riots.(16)

Travelling across class barriers, not to far distant lands in search of the "good savage" but to a world which was physically quite close, was almost as exotic to Flora Tristan as the New World was for explorers in the previous century. Observation, the visual technique as used in a medical visit, was the chief instrument of investigation. We are left in no doubt whatsoever as to the impression left on Flora Tristan after one such visit:

Les rêves d'une imagination en délire n'égalent point l'horreur de cette affreuse réalité !!! Promenades dans Londres p.192

The disgust serves to highlight the physical separation and isolation of the slums from the better off citizens:

Ce n'est pas sans un sentiment d'effroi que le visiteur pénètre dans l'étroite et sombre ruelle de Baimbridge. A peine y a-t-il fait dix pas qu'il est suffoqué par une odeur méphitique. Promenades dans Londres p.191

The best way to study poverty was to go and look at its visible signs, and to talk to those suffering its oppression - Flora Tristan, Villumé, Buret, Blanqui: all said the same. In the absence of the camera, and before the development of socio-statistical analysis, the eye and spoken word were the models for examining the unhappy state of the English poor.

Often the observer and listener turned into a preacher. Studying the evils of society at close proximity readily led to suggestions for ridding society of those evils. Buret, whom Flora Tristan urged the workers to read, stated:

La description de la misère est insuffisante. Il ne suffit plus de savoir comment les choses se passent, mais comment elles devraient se passer, afin qu'il y eût en ce monde moins de souffrance et de misère; et pour arriver là il ne faut pas seulement raconter, il faut juger.(17)

However, not all the investigation led to the same conclusion: far from it. Rigaud-Weiss, who ranks the importance of *Promenades dans Londres* alongside the works of Blanqui, Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux, traces the development of the first social investigators before Marx.(18) He suggests, as Flora Tristan shows in her chapter on prostitution, that many early studies were chiefly concerned with workers' morals, or anxious to publicise the works of voluntary societies. In such studies the selfishness of employers and thriftlessness of workers are reported. The former are exhorted to their duties of protector and the latter to temperance, love of work, and good behaviour. Many saw the dangers of continued laissez-faire and

suggested state intervention to enforce laws ensuring healthy working conditions and restraining the exploitation by the greedy capitalists. Villermé campaigned for a shorter working day (the first parliamentary attempt to control the length of the working day in England was the 1841 bill) and to have compulsory sanitation laws established. In short, there were many proposals to change conditions within the existing system. But Flora Tristan called these suggestions palliatives, and pursued an analysis which places her much closer to Buret and Marx, according to Rigaud-Weiss:

Flora Tristan est, somme toute, l'écrivain socialiste le plus proche de Buret. ... ses oeuvres ... servent comme maillon d'une chaîne entre Buret et Marx.(19)

Flora Tristan denounced the whole system in vigorous terms. Her study contains theoretical reflections on the whole functioning of capitalism, property, division of labour, the wage system, the means of production and the separation of labour and capital. Unlike other studies of working class misery, Flora Tristan contrasted the miserable plight of the poor with the great wealth of the upper classes, demonstrating that the latter's decadence and corruption were based on a vast accumulation of wealth built on the labour of starving masses, whose plight could not be altered within the existing system. Furthermore, Flora Tristan urged the workers to benefit from this investigation, dedicated it to them, and recommended further reading of the question by her contemporaries such as Buret.

## (b) A Critique of Capitalism

In contrast to Flora Tristan's subsequent work Union Ouvrière, in which she idealises the working class and calls for action, and in contrast to her message of universal love for all classes in Néphis, Promenades dans Londres is a factual presentation of the condition and life styles of the oppressor - the wealthy classes - and of the oppressed - women and the proletariat. In this work, certainly before its final popular edition of 1842, Flora Tristan is not proposing a particular form of action, but rather is trying to prompt her readers into asking themselves the question of what is to be done.

Clearly, the victims are not themselves in a position to act. Women are depicted as utterly helpless creatures whose only outlet, if they are educated enough, is to write. Workers are also depicted as being so repressed and alienated that they are unable to lift a finger to help themselves, let alone organise an uprising. As I mentioned earlier, Flora Tristan scornfully remarks that English workers could learn a lot from their French counterparts who have a noble tradition of rebellion: "*mourir en combattant!*" (Promenades dans Londres p.50) However, she does recognise that the Chartist movement is an important landmark in working class organisations, and also admires Robert Owen and Daniel O'Connell.

In establishing Flora Tristan's critique of capitalism, the first issue is the class question, the second is the economic order, the third the political order.



### (1) The Class System

This issue is one of the vaguest parts of Flora Tristan's analysis, for two reasons. Firstly, she is torn between her disapproval of the aristocracy as the oppressor and her allegiance to the upper classes. Secondly, she rarely mentions the rising industrialist bourgeoisie, and frequently attributes the evils of the economic order to the aristocratic order:

L'horrible oppression que l'aristocratie anglaise fait peser sur les peuples des îles Britanniques sur les laboureurs et les ouvriers qui créent toutes les richesses ... Promenades dans Londres p.47

There is no mistake as to who the oppressed are, but there certainly is confusion as to who are the oppressors. The relationship between the old order (the feudal one where the aristocracy ruled) and the new order (where the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie is the new dominant class) is poorly explained by Flora Tristan. Two factors could explain her lack of clarity. Firstly, in both France and England the new class of bourgeoisie was still having trouble being accepted as the dominant order - the 1832 Reform Act demonstrates this. Secondly, perhaps it was simply a confusion of terms, since Flora Tristan sometimes talks about the bourgeoisie as the new aristocracy: "*l'aristocratie d'argent*".

It is in the '*Dedicace. Aux classes ouvrières*', written in 1842, the chapter on the Chartist movement and the chapter on the Houses of Parliament, that the class issue occurs most specifically.

Promenades dans Londres shows that the ideas of social class and class struggle were common currency by 1840. Such terms as "proletariat" and "capitalist" were in use and were understood to refer to classes which were forming in inexorable opposition to each other as a result of free enterprise and the laissez-faire system:

... la grande lutte, celle qui est appelée à transformer l'organisation sociale, c'est la lutte engagée, d'une part, entre les propriétaires et capitalistes qui réunissent tout, richesse, pouvoir politique, et au profit desquels le pays est gouverné, et, d'autre part, les ouvriers des villes et des campagnes, qui n'ont rien, ni terres, ni capitaux, ni pouvoirs politiques ... Promenades dans Londres p.85

This is nothing less than a declaration of the inevitable class struggle, the bitter division of society which the Saint-Simonians wanted to avoid at all costs, and which Flora Tristan had tried to ignore when writing Néphis by concentrating on a message of universal love. In this class struggle, Flora Tristan predicts the succession of the proletariat to the ruling classes.

... lorsque le peuple est opprimé, l'insurrection devient un devoir sacré ... Promenades dans Londres p.50

#### (11) The Economic Order

The working class is now understood by Flora Tristan to embody the revolutionary strength (if not in England, possibly in France) necessary to uproot the established order and build a new society. Here is her force for change. She examines closely the conditions of work in her

chapter on factories entitled '*Ouvriers des manufactures*' with a view to showing how this revolutionary strength is being created.

In terms redolent of the Marxist dialectic, Flora Tristan describes capitalist production. On the one hand, the potential of the power and force of the new steam engine is acknowledged. On the other, the alienating effect of the human being is stressed. What progress in speed of production and elimination of menial tasks! What misery in the life of the worker at the mercy of the employer. This chapter thus attempts to analyse the effect of the arrival of the machine age on the organisation of society. Flora Tristan evokes Saint-Simonian sentiments to express the workers' alienation by citing Vinçard's song *Alerte*

...  
Va, c'est en vain  
Qu'en son dédain  
L'oisif raille  
De qui travaille ;  
Toi seule est roi,  
Réveille-toi,  
Producteur impose ta loi.  
... *Promenades dans Londres* p.110

She also quotes J.S. Mill's article in the *Westminster Review*, 'Grievances of the working classes', to show their helplessness and isolation:

*Les travailleurs sont aujourd'hui les parias de la société : il n'est jamais question d'eux dans le Parlement, à moins que ce ne soit pour proposer des mesures qui gênent leur liberté et entravent leurs plaisirs.*  
*Promenades dans Londres* p.110

Summing up the powerlessness and misery of the workforce, Flora Tristan claims that the proletariat is worse off than the slave population:

Le nègre est seulement exposé aux caprices de son maître, tandis que l'existence du prolétaire anglais, celle de sa femme, de ses enfants, sont à la merci du producteur. Promenades dans Londres p.111

The proletariat is entirely at the mercy of the producer who can fix wages at the lowest possible rate for subsistence survival; the result is a lifetime of hardship and an early grave for the worker and his dependents. The producer can impose dreadful working conditions, without fear of interference by the law, in the sure knowledge that there is a plentiful supply of labour. Horses cost more to replace than do workers:

Les propriétaires d'usines, de manufactures peuvent, sans en être empêchés par la loi, disposer de la jeunesse, de la sève de centaines d'hommes, acheter leur existence et la sacrifier, afin de gagner de l'argent ! Promenades dans Londres p.120

There are two further features of working class alienation: one is the dehumanising effect of the division of labour:

La division du travail poussée à l'extrême limite, et qui a fait faire des progrès si immenses à la fabrication, a annihilé l'intelligence, pour réduire l'homme à n'être qu'un engrenage de machines. Promenades dans Londres p.111

The consequences of the division of labour are entirely negative towards the intellectual and creative abilities of a human being, producing moral decline as well as physical debilitation:

Si l'ouvrier pouvait travailler à diverses parties de la fabrication, il ne serait pas accablé par sa nullité, par la perpétuelle inactivité de son intelligence : répétant toute la journée les même choses ... Promenades dans Londres p.112

The examples given of conditions of workers while in the factory, the pittance of their wages, and the alienating effects of the huge machines, reduce man himself to the state of a machine. Working people are dwarfed by the sheer scale and power of industrial and commercial processes:

L'Angleterre n'a plus de grandeur qu'en industrie ; mais elle est gigantesque, vue dans les instruments dûs à l'esprit mathématique des temps modernes, instruments magiques qui pétrifient tout autour d'eux ! Les docks, les chemins de fer, les immenses proportions des manufactures donnent l'idée de l'importance du commerce et de l'industrie britanniques. Promenades dans Londres pp.115-116

Changing the metaphor to an organic one, the worker is an ant in the middle of all these machines. The machines are compared to monsters and sharks:

... vous cherchez l'homme ; on le distingue à peine, réduit, par les proportions de tout ce qui l'entoure, à la grosseur d'une fourmi ; il est occupé à mettre sous le tranchant de deux grandes courbes, qui présentent la forme d'une mâchoire de requin, d'énormes barres de fer, que cette machine coupe avec la netteté d'un damas qui trancherait un navet. Promenades dans Londres p.116

If, however, and here is the optimism of Flora Tristan, this force and power is conquered, the alienating effect of the machine would dwindle beneath the progress for humanity:

Si d'abord je ressentis de l'humiliation à voir l'homme annihilé, ne fonctionnant plus lui-même que comme une machine, je vis bientôt l'immense amélioration qui ressortirait un jour de ces découvertes de la science : la force brutale anéantie, le travail matériel exécuté dans moins de temps, et plus le loisir laissé à l'homme pour la culture de son intelligence ; mais, pour que ces grands bienfaits se réalisent, il faut une révolution sociale.  
Promenades dans Londres pp.116-117

But, for this to happen, Flora Tristan insists that work must be organised differently. And this entails hygienic conditions, decent wages, and above all, the organisation of production in order to benefit humanity and ensure that it is at its service, rather than a system in which man is a slave to the machine.

#### (iii) The Political Institutions

The chapter entitled '*Les chartistes*' is one of the most critical chapters in Promenades dans Londres because, for the first time, it provides a statement by Flora Tristan on the relevance of political activity, not only in parliamentary terms, but also in terms of transcending formal political power. The Chartist movement, which was one of the first mass organised political movements, was witnessed by Flora Tristan in its heyday in 1839. In commenting on Chartism, Flora Tristan discusses the whole question of who holds power in England.

Mentioning the numerous sects and political divisions existing in England, Flora Tristan puts her finger on the real divisions in society caused by material interest:

... les croyances religieuses n'ont cependant qu'une influence secondaire dans la formation des partis. ... c'est principalement dans les intérêts matériels qu'il faut rechercher les mobiles des partis. Promenades dans Londres p.84

We have shown Flora Tristan's economic class analysis in the previous section. As Bédarida indicates, Flora Tristan is here enlarging on the themes and ideas of the Chartist movement. The conviction with which she presents her political arguments of the radical working class movement, combined with her economic class analysis, means that she had by then really and truly entered the political culture of the socialists:

La formulation de Flora Tristan donne une netteté et un éclat exceptionnels à ces thèmes classiques des discours et des articles Chartistes, qui eux-mêmes reprennent les thèses le plus radicales du mouvement ouvrier depuis vingt ans, c'est à dire la lutte inexpiable entre exploiters et exploités.(20)

In other words, the class struggle is now placed at the forefront of Flora Tristan's analysis, a place hitherto occupied by egalitarian and romantic ideals. This is where she first developed her socialist critical methodology of society. The socialism in Union Ouvrière, by contrast, is not so much analytical as prescriptive in setting out a programme of economic and social transformation to achieve a socialist society.

If Chartism is the first mass proletarian organisation in history, as Lenin claims,(21) it also happens to be the only one Flora Tristan describes with any enthusiasm, overlooking its failure to demand universal suffrage for both sexes. She was well aware of the potential force of this movement as an agent in the class struggle conducted within the context of the political system:

Aucune demi-mesure ne saurait satisfaire les chartistes ; ils n'auront jamais confiance en un parti dont l'objet serait de transférer aux bourgeois les privilèges de l'aristocratie ; car ils ne verraient qu'aggravation d'oppression dans une pareille extension de privilèges.  
Promenades dans Londres p.88

Because of her perception of the control of power through the political system and the potential of mass organisation of the proletariat, it is argued by some commentators that Flora Tristan's Promenades dans Londres:

... was one of the first truly socialist appraisals of the effects of industrial capitalism.(22)

The term 'socialist' here refers to the socialism beyond the utopian phase which became what is known as scientific or Marxist. Just as Flora Tristan discovered several essential points of Marxist socialism within the economic terms - exploited wage labour provided surplus capital for the employer through the division of labour and the minimum wage - so also does her analysis of the ownership of the means of production within the superstructure come close to a Marxist one. However, it is important to note that there is an important aspect of the ideology of scientific socialism which Flora Tristan did not develop,



and that is the question of the transformation from private to public ownership of the means of production.

The chapter on the Chartists is concerned with the superstructure and the question: how can political power through universal suffrage advance the cause of the workers? Thus while she is analysing an historical event as a witness, she is also providing the workers in France and in England with advice about the limitation of the usefulness of universal suffrage as a means of redistributing wealth and power.

Although the Chartist movement was a working class organisation, its demands were purely political. *It had a six-point programme in its petition, universal male suffrage, vote by ballot, equal electoral districts, abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament, payment of members, and annual elections.*

The Reform Act of 1832 had extended the franchise to the prosperous section of the middle class, but the workers were still excluded, and when Flora Tristan arrived in London in May 1839, the Chartists were about to submit their political demands to the House of Commons in the form of the "First People's Charter". It was rejected by 235 votes to 46 and there were widespread fears - and hopes - that a revolution was imminent. Hence Flora Tristan's solemn exhortation to the aristocracy to fear the vengeance of the people and appease their wrath. She traced the ideals of the Chartist movement against the background of the privileges of the aristocracy maintained through parliament, listing nine cases of laws passed against the interests of the workers. With the

establishment of universal suffrage, such laws, she said, could not be passed. This opinion was stated in an interrogative style as she was not quite sure of the answer:

Sous l'empire du suffrage universel, avouerait-on l'intention de porter le prix du pain jusqu'à affamer les ouvriers ? Promenades dans Londres p.88

As if to answer those who claim that universal suffrage is an end in itself, she added a footnote that gives further evidence of her socialist analysis of the relationship between the social and political superstructure and the economic infrastructure:

Je ne suis pas de ceux qui voient dans le vote universel un remède à tous nos maux ; les formes politiques ne sont que des moyens, mais il y a lieu de croire que le vote universel enverrait à la Chambre des hommes réellement dévoués aux intérêts sociaux et que leur nombre l'emporterait sur les représentants des intérêts privés.  
Promenades dans Londres p.89

Thus Flora Tristan is establishing her admiration for the Chartists as a movement and force against privilege and for equality, although she does not agree with their belief that this will be achieved solely by equal political representation.

Her account of the Chartist meetings she attended conveyed enthusiasm for the energetic and idealistic individuals she encountered in contrast to the absolute nullity of human intelligence manifested by the members of parliament. Nevertheless she asserted in her

'Dedicace. Aux classes ouvrières' that although political change was important, it was more important to change the whole social order:

C'est de l'ordre social, la base de l'édifice que vous devez vous occuper, et non de la politique, qui n'est qu'un pouvoir factice, existant aujourd'hui, renversé demain, rétabli sous une nouvelle forme, puis renversé encore.  
Promenades dans Londres p.52

While writing this, no doubt the early nineteenth century French experience of frequent changes of political régime without any redistribution of political power or economic wealth was foremost in Flora Tristan's mind.

What did Flora Tristan mean by "*l'ordre social*" and how could it be transformed peacefully without political change? This was the question which preoccupied her.

In 1839 the term "socialism" did not refer to a single system of thought, or to a party programme. It was more a general belief shared by radicals, especially in France and England, that society as a whole should be the fundamental object of moral and economic enquiry. Thus in the 1830s and the 1840s in France and in England it was a common assumption that any analysis of moral and economic life must lead to "*le social*". It must be emphasised that this was a radical position, a revolutionary one, going beyond the rationalist ideology of political egalitarian rights. Being a socialist meant accepting that the tribulations of life, crime, ignorance, hunger, disease, poverty, unemployment, and public and domestic immorality were social phenomena,

not individual responsibilities or acts of God. The fundamental problems of life were in fact problems of society. This is what Flora Tristan set out to prove in Promenades dans Londres. There were structural problems to be resolved (peacefully if possible) by changing the social organisation of a society either by mass action imposed on that society or by the so called dialectic process of inevitable change brought about by the interaction of a clash of interests.

The socialist perspective for Flora Tristan therefore meant an indictment of every established value and institution. It meant rejecting the idea that poverty and crime resulted from sin and individual moral culpability, meant rejecting a Church which taught inequality, submission and quiescence while granting a seal of legitimacy to tyrannical governments. It meant rejecting a political régime based upon inherited or bought privilege and corrupt administration, a régime which was unable to represent the people and unwilling to undertake responsibility for their moral, intellectual and physical well-being. All of this was implied by accepting that "*l'ordre social*" was the central principle for her enquiry. It meant transforming "*la base de l'édifice*" through the combined action of the oppressed and oppressing members of society to redress the evils affecting their lives.(23)

### (c) Lessons from Contemporaries

Despite the limitations of her class analysis and her confusions over class allegiance, despite the lack of a search for the means to redistribute wealth, the end of Flora Tristan's socialist's journey was the discovery that the working class cause was the call to action. Flora Tristan came to this conclusion partly as a result of the influence of certain contemporaries. She fully acknowledged her admiration for O'Connell, for example, and for the Chartists, though she demonstrated her intellectual independence by not joining their respective movements, and she expressed dismay at the time wasted by these radicals in internal squabbling. The qualities Flora Tristan admired in the Chartist movement and in the person of O'Connell were however instrumental in the germination of her partially formulated idea of a workers' union.

What is important, she suggests, is to emphasise what the groups have in common. She begins her chapter on Robert Owen by drawing the reader's attention to the fact that she is:

... ni saint-simonienne ni fourieriste ni owénienne.  
Promenades dans Londres p.317

but that she wishes to comment on the English socialist who came to similar conclusions to those of Saint-Simon in Russia and Fourier in France. The universality of socialism is therefore suggested.

The chapters on Owen and the Chartists contain the most important reference to the activists of Flora Tristan's time. As we have seen, the Chartists' chapter is important for recognising the need for a mass movement - so much so that she overlooked their lack of feminism and neglected to mention that they considered that a demand for universal suffrage would be harmful to their cause. Strength lay in mass organisation. That was to be emphasised.

Owen taught her this lesson also. She might have dismissed the Chartist search for political power through mass organisation of the working class, but Owen himself also attempted to found the National Consolidated Trades Union. For many reasons, Owen is admired by Flora Tristan. The first such reason is his personal commitment to his convictions. Secondly, unlike Saint-Simon and Fourier, he concentrated less on the abstract theory of socialism and more on its practical realities:

Jamais homme n'a paru, sur le grand théâtre du monde, doué à un plus haut degré que lui d'amour pour ses semblables ; trouver le remède à leurs maux a été pour Owen le but de quarante ans d'observations, d'expériences et de travaux. Promenades dans Londres p.321

Owen is, however, reproached by Flora Tristan for his simplistic determinism. Owen's basic tenet was that Man is a product of his surroundings; provide him with decent surroundings and he will respond accordingly. Flora Tristan thought Owen paid scant attention to people's spiritual needs:

Disons-le, Owen ne s'occupe pas assez des besoins animiques ; mais, en revanche, Owen me paraît admirable

quand il organise les intérêts matériels. Promenades dans Londres p.320

Owen's education system evoked profound respect from Flora Tristan because she saw it as so central to achieving change; it was to be an instrumental means of change in her Union Ouvrière. It could ensure equality of opportunity for girls and boys by giving them the same training. It could liberate parents from child care responsibilities to enable them to work and improve their lot. It could provide a means for workers to improve their skills and employability. The practical "lessons" of education extolled by Owen are given long descriptions by Flora Tristan.

Flora Tristan describes how Owen shortened the working day in his model community "New Harmony" and introduced schools and clean surroundings. Not only does this improve the happiness of the workers, but it generates higher productivity of labour and capital. The division of labour has an alienating effect, claims Owen. If the workers were to have a shorter working day, they would have time to develop their faculties. Universal education and varied employment are the ways of putting a stop to the brutalising effects of the division of labour.

Robert Owen was convinced that improving the workers' conditions would in the long run make capitalism more efficient. Flora Tristan ties that idea in with her suggestion that the new advances in the industrial age can be put to humanity's benefit. But she is not interested in the efficiency of the system of production. Far from

being an admirer of all Robert Owen's experiments, Flora Tristan's approval centred on his development of an education programme, since for her this was already a key idea in improving the condition of women.

The attention given to Owen's career belies the fact that his preaching fell largely on deaf ears. His atheistic socialism meant he fell foul of the Anglican establishment. Flora Tristan's chapter ends with a warning of possible revolution if the misery is not alleviated in some way. She again remarked that had the English even a couple of Articles from the French Charter of 1830 they would be much better off. This is, of course, where Flora Tristan reveals her somewhat blissful ignorance of the state of repression in France. Instead, they have a reactionary bishop condemning socialism from the pulpit and commending persecution.(24) The socialists, she declared, will be the new martyrs if they are outlawed. Their faith and bravery will be proved in the face of this persecution and repression.

Twenty million workers go hungry. They are bound to succeed. Man is capable of rebellion, and inevitably will rebel against such repression. Flora Tristan's intention is now to channel this energy into action for change.

The other contemporary whose influence on Flora Tristan was profound was Daniel O'Connell. In the chapter on the Houses of Parliament, Daniel O'Connell is mentioned. His oratorical skills and organisational ability of rousing "*une nation entière*" clearly stir Flora Tristan. Ironically, here was a rather conservative politician praised



to the skies - the same man who had Bronterre O'Brien, a powerful speaker and radical activist, banned from political affairs in Ireland because he was a Chartist. In short, Daniel O'Connell, much to Flora Tristan's regret, did not have the interests of the working class at heart. This was not surprising. His country was not an industrialised nation and was still struggling for national freedom. The aim of O'Connell's struggle for Catholic emancipation was not discussed. It was his method which was greatly admired by Flora Tristan, no doubt because of its success.

#### (4) CONCLUSION

Promenades dans Londres contains a further development of Flora Tristan's feminism and socialism. As a measure of this development, it is important to emphasise the new socialist context of her feminism. By placing her study of women's oppression in this context, Flora Tristan was searching for possibilities for implementing genuine change for women. She had already explored existing possibilities and found them to be inadequate. It is no coincidence that Flora Tristan's chapter on bourgeois women should praise Wollstonecraft's ideas, founded chiefly on egalitarian ideals. The egalitarian approach was to be the basis on which bourgeois women founded their campaign of emancipation throughout the following century. But equality of political, legal and economic rights, without attacking the social order of the class system, could only mean improvement for women who were already materially well off. Had Flora Tristan campaigned only for equal rights for women, she would

not have been able to attack the hierarchical class structure of society and campaign for change which would affect the lives of working class women.

There was no question, however, of separating working class women from their male counterparts. For this reason she found herself examining conditions of that class. In Promenades dans Londres, while Flora Tristan concentrated on highlighting her socialist critique of capitalism, she was able to describe the merits of her contemporaries and their campaigns. In doing so, she refused to be drawn into discussions of a new morality, such as the one advanced by Enfantin and his followers or by Fourier. Flora Tristan preferred to develop the practical side of implementing change. She was possibly aware that the followers of Fourier and Saint-Simon had alienated many potential followers in the working classes by concentrating on discussions of a new moral order. She could see that the vital element in any effort to achieve change was the mass organisation. What she admired most in her contemporaries was the strength of their convictions and their ability to mobilise.

Despite the hazy structure of the book, Flora Tristan succinctly highlighted the basic elements of the socialist critique, enough to direct her towards implementing her discovery, campaigning for and through the working class in developing Union Ouvrière.

# Footnotes to Chapter Four

- 1 Lucien Schéler, *'La geste romantique de Flora Tristan'*, p.33
- 2 Sandra Dijkstra, *Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change*, p.213
- 3 For an account of this movement see Laure Adler, *A l'aube du féminisme: les premières femmes journalistes 1830-1850* (Paris: Payot, 1979)
- 4 Examples cited by François Bédarida: see his notes to *Promenades dans Londres*, p.32. For a further discussion of Flora Tristan's sentiments on this question, see also *Nécessité de faire bon accueil aux femmes étrangères* édition présentée et commentée par Denys Cuche, p.29
- 5 Jean-Pierre Rioux, *'Tristan, ethnographe de la révolte'* in *Les Nouvelles Littératures*, no.2642, part 29/6, 1978, p.11
- 6 Jean-Pierre Lacassagne, *'Auguste Barbier et Flora Tristan, témoins de l'aurore du « victorianisme »'* in *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature*, p.117
- 7 See François Bédarida's introduction to *Promenades dans Londres*, p.25
- 8 Jean Hawkes develops this point in the introduction to her translation of *Promenades dans Londres, Flora Tristan's London Journal* (London: Virago, 1982) p.xxi
- 9 See François Bédarida notes, *Promenades dans Londres*, p.109
- 10 Laure Adler, *'Flora, Pauline et les autres'*, p.194
- 11 Finishing houses were late night entertainment establishments where members of the aristocracy were entertained by prostitutes.
- 12 Laure Adler, *A l'aube du féminisme: les premières femmes journalistes*
- 13 Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p.37
- 14 G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London, Macmillan, 1965) p.1
- 15 G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, pp.1-2
- 16 J.F.C. Harrison, *The Early Victorians 1832-1851* (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 1971) p.151

- 17 Cited in H. Rigaud-Weiss, Les Enquêtes Ouvrières en France entre 1830 et 1848 (Paris: P.U.F., 1936) p.87
- 18 H. Rigaud-Weiss, Les Enquêtes Ouvrières en France, pp.114-124
- 19 H. Rigaud-Weiss, Les Enquêtes Ouvrières en France, pp.122-123
- 20 See François Bédarida's notes in Promenades dans Londres, p.85
- 21 Cited in François Bédarida's notes in Promenades dans Londres, p.85
- 22 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.246
- 23 For a lengthy discussion on "la question sociale", see the introduction to Paul Corcoran, Before Marx: Socialism and Communism: 1830-1848 (London: Macmillan, 1983) pp.1-29
- 24 Cited in François Bédarida's notes in Promenades dans Londres, p.336

## Chapter Five

### UNION OUVRIERE: EQUALITY WITH A DIFFERENCE

Chapter two demonstrated that Flora Tristan began her career in contact with contemporary feminists and socialists in France. Chapter three shows how she tried out some of their ideas. Chapter four goes on to illustrate how she was familiar with the radicals on the other side of the Channel. As a recapitulation, the following points must be borne in mind. The utopian socialists condemned capitalism as a system but preached change by peaceful means, through a collaboration of the two classes, the owners of the means of production and the workers. Flora Tristan retained their critique of capitalism and messianic vision of the redemption of humanity through women. From the feminists Flora Tristan learnt the value of writing as a form of action, how to generalize her own experience of oppression, and how to translate this into specific demands for changes in the law, such as the legalization of divorce. Here again her interest went much further than the particular demands of one gender. Workers' movements were beginning to develop around the idea of mutual self-help associations, but their idea of solidarity did not extend to women, as fellow workers, or as fellow victims of oppression. This chapter contains a closer scrutiny of how

Flora Tristan reacted to her contemporaries as she began to formulate her own campaign.

The first part of this chapter will examine the question of why Flora Tristan chose the particular form of action set out in Union Ouvrière. What could contemporary movements offer? What did they fail to offer? The second part will demonstrate how the notion of working class solidarity was the main driving force to have Union Ouvrière succeed.

However, class collaboration was equally important in order to attract support, not only from enlightened members of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie but also and especially to draw in women from other classes to support their fellow victims of oppression.

The third part of the chapter analyses Flora Tristan's perception of gender equality.

#### (1) FLORA TRISTAN'S CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS IN FRANCE

As has been recorded by Puech and Desanti, among others, Flora Tristan wrote to Fourier in 1835 begging him to avail of her services in serving a worthwhile cause. (Lettres p.56) What is not so frequently mentioned is that she also wrote to Eugénie Niboyet, an energetic feminist, mentioning the possibility of collaboration on a proposed journal for women:

J'ai l'intime conviction qu'en créant le journal dont nous avons l'idée nous ferons une belle et louable action; je suis sûre que ce sera le moyen de nous rendre utile à la société chose que je désire avec tant d'ardeur!  
Lettres p.58

Flora Tristan's correspondence alone gives testimony to the importance she attached to association with other activists in France at the time. However, this association often amounted to little more than fleeting contact. In his edited collection of Flora Tristan's letters, Stéphane Michaud indicates,(1) as does Fernand Rude,(2) that by the time she came to collecting subscriptions for publishing her book, Union Ouvrière, she and Eugénie Niboyet had parted company. There is evidence to suggest that Flora Tristan was in contact with women on a regular basis from 1836 onwards but only to a limited extent.(3) However, the conclusion from the previous chapter suggests that by the time the third edition of Promenades dans Londres appeared, Flora Tristan was sure that it was towards movements with the interests of workers at heart that her allegiance lay.(4) There is no evidence to suggest that she was still interested in forming a women's organisation to change their position in society, such as the one she had envisaged in Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères. The history of early utopian movements such as the Saint-Simonian school shows that where the emancipation of women was concerned, examples of such efforts did exist in the 1830s, but none had fared well; on the contrary, they had all been reviled and ridiculed by the establishment, chiefly through the press. In Flora Tristan's analysis of the position of women in society in Promenades dans Londres, the helplessness and powerlessness of women

were emphasised; it was possibly for this reason that after writing Promenades dans Londres, beyond contacting individual women whom she hoped would be supportive of her cause, Flora Tristan did little or nothing to attempt to mobilise women around specifically feminist issues. Further reasons for this will become clear after an analysis of Union Ouvrière

To state that contacts with other aspiring militants rarely extended beyond the preliminary letter of introduction did not mean that Flora Tristan did not value contact with her contemporary socialists: quite the opposite. What limited the degree of collaboration Flora Tristan had with others was the affinity they felt with her aims. This affinity scarcely survived one or two meetings. Not one other group of intellectuals, women, or workers, was interested in all of her aims. The very novelty of her idea of uniting the feminist and socialist struggle condemned her to isolation.

Flora Tristan's interest in contemporary movements is noteworthy, however, for two reasons. Firstly, she saw them all as useful for the development of her own ideas, and not conversely. Secondly, she managed to create something unique in spite of borrowing freely from many vital forces at the time.

One difficulty lay in the fact that contemporary feminist movements were quite rare. As Dijkstra states,(5) a point reiterated by Moon,(6) the first flourish of Saint-Simonian feminist activity occurred only during the more liberal years of the July Monarchy. It is true that



before this the first women journalists had some success in printing newspapers. Adler gives an interesting account of the modest efforts of bourgeois women, and the more radical efforts of the proletarian Saint-Simonian women such as Suzanne Voilquin, to collectivise a women's movement.(7) All this happened, however, when Flora Tristan was in Peru. By the time she returned, censorship had ensured silence of the the most outspoken critics of the economic and social order. By using the messianic feminist idea, Flora Tristan was however able to capitalise on the efforts made by the avant garde women who had gone to considerable lengths to have themselves heard.(8) Of mass movements there were none. Individual feminists and socialists participated enthusiastically in the early days of the 1848 revolution, especially those who had been involved in journalistic efforts of the previous decades. But of course Flora Tristan did not live to see 1848.

While writing the later edition of *Promenades dans Londres*, Flora Tristan declared that she did not wish to be associated with any of the many existing sects - she found something wrong with all of them.(9) Nevertheless, it was into this milieu that she had endeavoured to become established and known after her return from Peru in 1834 even though she was eventually to reject association with any group in particular. In addition to correspondence, she organised and attended meetings, thriving on the exchange of ideas, freely borrowing from the very people she criticised. Armogathe and Cole give examples of how Flora Tristan was quick to pick up and develop the ideas of Perdiguier and Moreau, admittedly ideas in their infancy.(10)

The fact that she committed to paper her criticism of her contemporaries, however, inhibited good working relationships with people such as Considérant. In a letter to Considérant, dated August 1836, she criticised him for mystifying Fourier's followers by oversophisticated language and jargon:

Sans doute que pour vous, et pour plusieurs de ses sectaires, sortis des écoles ou les hautes sciences sont enseignées et d'où l'on soit passé maître, sans doute que pour vous autres la science de M. Fourier est *lucide et claire*; mais encore, répondez avec franchise, combien y a-t-il d'années que vous étudiez cette science? Lettres  
p.62

It could be that because of the absence of any existing organised mass movement which catered for both feminist and socialist aspirations, Flora Tristan determined to form one of her own. Dijkstra attributes her aloofness and isolation from the embryonic socialist and feminist groups in part to her nature. Because of her autocratic and domineering personality, not only was she hypercritical of the various schisms and sects, but she also failed to communicate with those she was most interested in serving, such as the élite of the working class, Perdiguier, Gosset, Vinçard and other artisans, who had already started to rehearse the idea of a more united working class, and who could have provided her with introductions to members of the working class itself, few of whom she had actually met by then.

The fact that, as a woman, she was criticising some of the most intimate details of her fellow activists' family lives was a real stumbling block to good relations, as Adler is quick to point out.(11)

To a certain extent it is true that Flora Tristan's personality did determine her difficult relationship with possible allies, but this cannot account for the full explanation as to why no mass feminist and socialist movements had yet formed in France in the 1840s. The answer lies in the historical development of French capitalism, the relations of production and organisation of the labour force, which were at an elementary stage.

From her early observations of her fellow socialists, she had decided by 1836 that her idea for action had to be a simple one:

Présentez-nous un plan complet que l'esprit puisse saisir d'un coup d'oeil; que la simplicité et la vérité de ses chiffres portent la conviction aux plus incrédules. Oh! je vous promets qu'alors vous verrez accourir vers vous des milliers de coeurs .... *Lettres* p.63

But this simple programme for action required a new movement. The chief reason, therefore, for Flora Tristan's decision to found her own movement was that she felt a need to create something new and unique. No existing organisation was strong enough to be worthy of her support and no one leading figure appeared specifically interested in women and working class interests within the same movement. Goldberg-Moses emphasises that Considérant's school, which took most of the ideas of Fourier, played down feminism in order to avoid the ridicule to which the Saint-Simonians had been subjected. The phalangists avoided those aspects of Fourierism which threatened either the family or accepted sexual mores.(12) Dijkstra states categorically that Flora Tristan was literally the only vocal feminist in the 1840s, which is rather an

exaggeration. One only has to read Armogathe's Histoire du Feminisme français to find exceptions. However, Dijkstra does go on to state:

Her articulation of the need to link socialism and feminism, her description of the reification of women in marriage and in prostitution in Promenades, went beyond Fourier; besides, he was dead, and his disciples had more or less dropped the controversial issue, although Considérant continued to lend minimal support to Tristan's effort.(13)

There is a tendency among historians of feminism to dismiss individual feminists active during the 1840s who were not part of the by then already waning Saint-Simonian or Fourier school. There were, however, individuals such as Pauline Roland, Hortense Allart and Eugénie Niboyet, all active, each in their own way. *Nevertheless, it is true that* feminism did not exist other than at this individual level. Beyond the journalistic efforts of the early 1830s, there is no evidence of collective action. We do not have complete documentation of Flora Tristan's contact with these women, but from what information is available, it is clear that such contact must have been minimal. It was certainly not substantial enough to merit mention by her.

The need for a mass movement in France was impressed upon Flora Tristan by her reflections upon the activities of Daniel O'Connell in Ireland. As mentioned in the previous chapter, although he did not lead a working class movement towards socialist goals, O'Connell had succeeded in mobilising the masses. The actual cause did not matter so much as the capacity for a strong leader to captivate the millions of poverty-stricken and, therefore, helpless peasants. Flora Tristan gave

the example of the Irish experience in terms of "union" and "association" and concluded her analysis by indicating the lessons to be drawn for the masses in France:

Si je cite toujours l'Irlande comme exemple, c'est parce que l'Irlande est encore le seul pays qui ait su comprendre que le peuple, s'il veut sortir de l'esclavage, doit commencer d'abord par former une vaste UNION, compacte, solide, indissoluble, car l'*union fait la force*, et pour réclamer ses droits, pour fixer l'attention générale sur la justice d'une réclamation, il faut avant tout se mettre en position de pouvoir parler avec assez d'autorité pour se faire écouter. *Union Ouvrière* p.20

The lesson, in fact, was the outcome of a perceptive analysis by Flora Tristan into the question of how new mass movements must overcome their weaknesses. Against the weight of the establishment they must have a coherent organisation which would be a source of strength in itself. Lacking this quality of unity and strength, as Desanti points out,(14) the majority of socialists in the very early 1840s were bedevilled by mutual recriminations, schisms and fervour, none of them attracting a great deal of numerical support. Small groups would form, publish one or two editions of a newspaper, then disappear. The police frequently dissolved such groups and banned the publication of their newspapers. Publishing, however, was an essential part of a group's activity in these early days of socialism:

Most of the influential system-builders of the period - Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, Cabet - unabashedly thought that the publication of their theoretical system was itself a great landmark separating two historical epochs.(15)

There was something highly symbolic for radical groups in getting their ideas published. It must not be forgotten, as Corcoran indicates,(16) that publishing radical ideas, given the control and censorship of the press, was a political act in itself. In order to become known, it was the only way. Flora Tristan realised this when she took desperate steps to have Union Ouvrière published. Mass meetings were banned. No socialist sect was powerful enough in France to defy and survive the wrath of the establishment without the capacity to publish its ideas.

But publication in itself was not enough. A strong organisation was also necessary. Significantly, Daniel O'Connell had defied legality by standing for parliament, although ineligible, and by being elected. His success was to be attributed to the strength of the organisation backing him. This was the kind of action Flora Tristan envisaged. She considered the utopian idea of forming exemplary communes much too inward looking and doomed to failure. Her impatience with contemporary movements stemmed from their failure to act or have an effect upon the masses:

... le tort des saint-simoniens, c'est « qu'ils ne bougent pas », ils attendent ; la venue de la femme sauvera le monde, croient-ils ; alors pourquoi se contenter de l'attendre ?(17)

So Flora Tristan set out to work on two fronts. One aim was to publish her ideas with a view to their widest possible dissemination. The other aim was to try and create an organisation to directly mobilise the masses. In the first aim she achieved only moderate success. Her

work, Promenades dans Londres was well received in Paris among the enlightened intellectuals:

Les milieux avancés, axés sur le progrès, formés d'intellectuels, d'artistes, d'artisans, d'ouvriers, assez séparés les uns des autres, mais aux idées parallèles, étaient avides de documents.(18)

Several journals, including La Revue du Progrès, La Fraternité and Le Nouveau Monde, published extracts from the book. However, women were not much interested in her work. According to Puech,(19) Flora Tristan sent the book to individual women asking them to publicise it, but its reception was poor, since many women found it rather distasteful reading for a female, and they considered it rather improper to have been written by a woman.

Interestingly, contemporary movements helped Flora Tristan to achieve publicity for her study of the condition of the working classes in England. The Fourierist following headed by Considérant lent considerable support to Flora Tristan, publishing extracts of her works and getting her introductions to the working class. But her criticism of this group of socialists for their organisational ineptitude never moderated. She considered that they were doomed to failure because they were waiting for the enlightened bourgeoisie to act, counting on the efforts of an élite instead of mass support. Flora Tristan's criticisms are directed at the failure of the different sects to mobilise support, despite their well-intentioned aims of regenerating humanity by rescuing the working class from its ignominious existence. Puech sums up her criticism thus:

En somme, le fourierisme est une invention ingénieuse - originale ou non, - c'est de la fantaisie socialiste et qui procède comme le saint-simonisme d'un esprit bourgeois. Ce n'est pas encore de là que sortira l'émancipation du peuple, ni surtout son effort d'émancipation, sa volonté d'émancipation. Il ne faut pas « éterniser » dans les organisations tutélaires; le peuple n'est peut être pas prêt, mais il est mûr pour la préparation.(20)

Instead of recommending universal suffrage as did the Chartists, Flora Tristan reckoned the priority lay elsewhere.

Pauvres ouvriers ! isolés, vous ne comptez pour rien dans la nation ; mais aussitôt l'UNION OUVRIERE CONSTITUEE, la classe ouvrière deviendra un corps puissant et respectable ; et les hommes du plus haut mérite brigueront l'honneur d'être choisis défenseurs de l'UNION OUVRIERE. Union Ouvrière p.29

This brings us to the second of Flora Tristan's aims - that of creating a mass working class movement. The paradox of the intellectual socialist's position, by no means unique to Flora Tristan, emerges when considering her position vis à vis the working class. Flora Tristan recognised that the strength of an emancipatory movement lay in the masses. Yet the masses, that is, the working class, needed outside guidance, she decided, in the form of Union Ouvrière, since it was not sufficiently self-conscious to realise its own potential. Even though it possessed the strength for action, it needed a trigger to set this strength in motion. Flora Tristan's purpose was to find that trigger in a leader possessing the qualities Daniel O'Connell displayed. It was with the intention of choosing someone suitable that Flora Tristan began to scrutinise existing movements rather more critically than when she was trying to become better known.



We can conclude by stating that there was never any intention on Flora Tristan's part of integrating into an existing movement despite her recognition of the need for solidarity. All existing movements were seen as a help in publicising her ideas, salutary examples of failed organisations and training grounds for a potential leader of a successful mass movement in the future.

## (2) FLORA TRISTAN'S CHOICE OF ACTION IN UNION OUVRIERE

### (a) Failure of Contact with the Working Class Elite

One form of contemporary movement was considered by Flora Tristan to hold out more hope than the others until it too failed to come up to her expectations - that was the nascent unionist activity of the working class élite in France.

By her own personal experience she knew what poverty was, but she had little or no contact with the French working class. It was all very well reading doctors' reports on poverty or sociologists' facts and figures, but there were even more valuable accounts by workers themselves. These could reveal the extent of class awareness. Desanti suggests that Flora Tristan had a good understanding of the effort required to combat illiteracy:

Ces ouvriers conscients, devenus intellectuels par un effort qu'elle connaît bien, ayant dû l'accomplir, Flora les cherche.(21)

Given the limitations of her literary success, Flora Tristan had further reason to seek contacts there. Anxious to gain contact with the working class itself rather than with those simply concerned with it from other backgrounds, she looked to the most prominent self-educated workers who wrote on the need of the working class to unite to combat the evils of poverty - figures such as Agricol Perdiguier, Gosset, Moreau and Boyer. Indeed it was to this group that she first directed her idea of Union Ouvrière.

Puech reveals that in February 1843, gratified by the attention Promenades dans Londres received from La Ruche, Flora Tristan wrote individually to Gosset, Vinçard, Moreau, and Perdiguier, asking for addresses where workers met in Paris, in order to gain an introduction into the working class milieu.(22) It was not long before she was invited to meetings.

Contrary to her expectations, however, these self-taught workers, who were already motivated into going to meetings and forming unions, were not easy to manipulate. They had their own set ideas about tactics, and the painful lesson of the difficulties of associating with the working class became more and more obvious to Flora Tristan. It is significant that details of these meetings are given in her diary as the starting point of her campaign. She included a record of preliminary meetings with the workers despite their lack of success. Relationships were not improved by Flora Tristan's criticism of their life style. Her comments on their family behaviour and the chapter on women produced the most severe antagonism:

La lecture du chapitre relatif au rôle des femmes fut écoutée avec moins d'attention et provoqua de nouvelles observations de Vinçard. Il y était question des habitudes des ouvriers d'aller au cabaret et Vinçard craignait qu'on reprît les éternels griefs généralement formulés par la bourgeoisie à ce propos.(23)

This attempt by Flora Tristan to influence the working class élite in order to gain their support and help in launching her appeal to the workers as a whole, was met with hostility. The fact was that the élite workers and she simply had different ideas about what was to be done. These first meetings were to be the first raw reactions of workers to her proposals for their own salvation before the work was even published. *She could have rewritten sections after the poor reception of the chapter on women, but the feminist in her could not allow that.* Existing organised workers thus refused to have anything to do with publishing Union Ouvrière. By the end of March 1843, it was becoming abundantly clear that if Flora Tristan was going to do something, it would have to be by herself, even if the intention was to mobilise a whole class by her own efforts. Without the backing of any organisation or newspaper, publishing became even more crucial to Flora Tristan's individual campaign. Indeed, by succeeding in her effort to collect the cost of publication, she was reassured that her ideas were well received in some quarters, mostly among the enlightened or the impoverished bourgeoisie, people such as herself! So crucial was this method of broadcasting Union Ouvrière that a blow by blow account of it is integral to the text in the form of a preface for each edition, including a list of the subscribers.

Accordingly, Flora Tristan determined a plan to take Union Ouvrière direct to the mass of workers in France, bypassing the working class élite. With that aim in mind, she decided to go on a tour of France, to meet the workers themselves with no intermediaries. She hoped to stimulate the workers to organise themselves to be the instruments of their own liberation. Just how she expected them to be the instruments of the enfranchisement of women shall be seen in due course.

#### (b) Class Solidarity

In this part we will examine how Flora Tristan saw class solidarity as the crucial element for Union Ouvrière to succeed in bringing about change.

Flora Tristan's plan was to involve the working class of France in the same way that Daniel O'Connell had involved the mass of peasants in Ireland: to unite them on a simple issue. This plan was no utopian dream of a new society such as a *phalanstère*, Icarie, or New Harmony, described in such a detailed manner as to make it incomprehensible to the illiterate; neither was it a demand for the reorganisation of society in the way that scientific socialists claimed was necessary to end exploitation. Any restructuring of the economy was in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and therefore did not concern the working class. Because of the nature of the document, a propaganda exercise, the full capitalist analysis of the cause of poverty is not outlined. The working class is not urged to take up arms against the Monarchy, the State or even

property. Poverty is the enemy. It is an enemy that the workers can combat by their own limited means available. Flora Tristan carefully explained her choice of tactics:

Proposer un moyen qui , par son exécution simple et facile , procure à la classe ouvrière la possibilité de sortir graduellement , et sans secousses violentes , de l'état précaire où elle est plongée , est , selon moi , l'unique but que doivent se proposer tous ceux qui désirent sincèrement l'amélioration véritable et efficace de la classe la plus *nombreuse* et la plus *utile*.  
Union Ouvrière p.13

Flora Tristan's decision not to undertake an economic analysis of capitalism may seem a strange omission in a document designed to mobilise working class solidarity in the cause of feminism and socialism, but it must be remembered, however, that capitalism was in its infancy in France in 1843, and as Dijkstra perceptively notes:

While economic factors were primarily responsible for the development of working class consciousness in England, according to Dolléans [p.32], in France, psychological factors (based on the disillusioning experience of the July Revolution) were responsible, creating a class consciousness antecedent to the actual development of such a class. We have to keep this historical comparison in mind to understand Flora Tristan's idyllic depiction of the situation of workers in France by contrast to those in England.(24)

Armogathe makes a similar point. Flora Tristan wanted to create the working class in France before it was born.(25)

Nevertheless, there remains an element of contradiction in Flora Tristan's approach. On the one hand she is recommending to the workers that they can save themselves from poverty; on the other hand she

firmly believes that poverty is created by society as a whole. Perhaps what society creates, the working class can destroy? Certainly, by demanding in her brochure the right to work, Flora Tristan believed that such an elementary and basic message would trigger off the desired mobilisation of the working class. Indeed, in her introduction to the work she intended to demonstrate to the workers that by its very creation, the brochure was a salutary lesson in that it showed them who their friends were in other classes - implying that if the workers sought to save themselves they would be joined by members in all parts of society. Solidarity in the name of humanity was emphasised from the very start, and Flora Tristan issued a call to all desiring an improvement in the plight of the workers to produce funds for her plan, to demonstrate their solidarity with the oppressed.

Thus, it is generally recognised that Union Ouvrière is at one and the same time a programme for the immediate alleviation of poverty, a long term class-consciousness raising exercise and a clarion call for social solidarity throughout the class system.

Let us now examine the content of the book.

After a lengthy introduction in which the decision to solicit funds and the ensuing collection and correspondence are described, the section entitled '*Aux ouvriers et aux ouvrières*' begins. Flora Tristan explained why her suggestions were fundamentally different from the suggestions issuing from previous campaigns for the emancipation of the workers. She pointed out that workers were living in terrible misery, that this

could be a dangerous situation for society, that it was the duty of the government and of the rich to do something in the name of human justice, and that previous warnings issued by the socialists had gone completely unheeded. As an example of fruitless endeavours, leading socialists are mentioned in a footnote. (Union Ouvrière p.3) All the individual voices of outsiders from outside the working class had been powerless to persuade the government to act. It was now time for self-emancipation. Workers, Flora Tristan declared, there is only one thing left to do:

*... agir en vertu des droits inscrits dans la Charte.*  
Union Ouvrière p.4

It must be supposed that for reasons of simplification, the discrepancies between 1789 and the 1830 Charters were overlooked by Flora Tristan.

It is important to note that from the outset, Flora Tristan envisaged action within the constraints of the law. There were to be no unconstitutional forms of militancy:

*... ce n'est pas la révolte à la main armée , l'emeute sur la place publique , l'incendie ni le pillage. Union Ouvrière p.4*

If violent action was proscribed, government initiative wanting, and outside help from the socialists ineffective, it was up to the workers themselves to act:

*Or , le jour est venu où il faut agir et c'est à vous , à vous seuls , qu'il appartient d'agir dans l'intérêt de votre propre cause. Union Ouvrière p.4*

The call to workers is couched in terms of rights; the workers were reminded by Flora Tristan of the 1789 revolution which heralded the era of natural rights. The rights Flora Tristan mentioned concerned practical elements of a worker's life, rather than the abstract notion of natural rights. She informed workers that their condition was atrocious because they had no basic rights such as:

... droit au travail ... droit à l'hôpital ... droit à l'aumône ... Union Ouvrière p.5

Animals and bees were better off than the workers who had to find food to survive. She asked them:

... d'où vient la principale cause de vos maux?  
Union Ouvrière p.5

If ants and bees had to work in isolation they too would die of hunger:

- Isolés, vous êtes faibles et tombez accablés sous le poids des misères de toutes sortes! Union Ouvrière p.5

Flora Tristan was calling for a union of all workers regardless of skills or occupations to form a united working class. One of the tasks of this union would be to construct several buildings, called "Palais de l'Union Ouvrière", distributed evenly throughout France.

This was to be a self-help programme. The workers were to demand nothing from the employers, the exploiters; as if to goad the workers into action, she suggested that the workers had the key to their own



salvation. The cause of poverty was the lack of solidarity. Following the opening '*Aux ouvriers et aux ouvrières*', there is a section entitled '*De l'insuffisance des sociétés de secours, compagnonnage, etc.*' wherein Flora Tristan dwelt on the reasons for the divisions and weaknesses of the existing working class organisations.

That the old system of *Compagnonnage* had a divisive effect on skilled workers is borne out by contemporary attempts of the elite of the working class to end the divisive system. The most notable campaigner was Perdiguier. Contact Flora Tristan had with such groups has been mentioned earlier in this chapter.(26)

Flora Tristan considered it vital that the workers should understand the differences between her union and the unions which were already in existence. The aims of these existing unions were to serve as mutual assistance groups, that is, simply to help one another. Assistance against hardship in sickness, accidents and unemployment did not extend beyond members. To the extent that these societies relieved some of the misery of workers, Flora Tristan approved of them, but the evil must be attacked at its root:

... *soulager la misère n'est pas la détruire ; adoucir le mal n'est pas l'extirper. Union Ouvrière p.15*

The actions of these mutual assurance societies, no matter how laudable, do not alter the position of the workers in society:

... malgré les *bonnes intentions* de ces sociétés, la classe pauvre est toujours restée aussi pauvre. Union Ouvrière p.16

Their separateness, their failure to see the need to extend their benefits to the whole working class was, she claimed, their central deficiency. "What is the root of the problem?" Flora Tristan asks. Her answer is the divisive effect of small societies and unions on the workers. Once more she is attributing the cause of misery in the working classes to their own actions:

Où donc est le mal?. - Le mal est dans cette organisation bâtarde, mesquine, égoïste, absurde, qui divise la classe ouvrière en une multitude de petites sociétés particulières ... Union Ouvrière p.16

There is some confusion in the twentieth century reader's mind as to whether Flora Tristan's charge of divisiveness was directed at what remained of the old system of *Compagnonnage*, or to the feeble attempts made to resist its exploitation. On no account will Flora Tristan admit here that it is the capitalist system itself that divides the workers, despite the fact that she has admitted it elsewhere, in Néphis and in Promenades dans Londres.

Flora Tristan's Union Ouvrière, she claims, will be different because it will surmount all division and weakness:

Ouvriers, il faut donc sortir au plus vite de cette voie de division et d'isolement où vous êtes, et marcher courageusement et fraternellement dans l'unique voie qui vous convienne, - *l'union*. - Le projet d'union que j'ai conçu , repose sur une base large , et son esprit est

capable de satisfaire pleinement aux exigences morales et matérielles d'un grand peuple. Union Ouvrière p.17

Having stressed the importance of the concept of solidarity, and hinted at the long term benefits, Flora Tristan sets out in some detail her plans for the immediate creation of the "*Palais*". So far, the workers' union is a self help organisation, initially not to be a force to end exploitation by removing private ownership of production or even by altering relations of production, but simply to provide the workers with the means of surviving under the existing system by making their material existence more bearable. The very rights of which they were deprived - *droit au travail, droit à l'hôpital, droit à l'aumône* - would generally be realised immediately by the creation and construction of workers' centres. The obvious exception would be the creation of jobs. Here solidarity is the key to action since the strength of the newly formed organisation would make it easier for workers to demand jobs. Acknowledgement of the dependence of the workers on their exploiters is thus only implicit.

Details of setting up links: '*Des moyens de constituer la classe ouvrière*', will be discussed here although what was to go on in the "*Palais*" is contained in a later section of Union Ouvrière

To whet the workers' appetites for what is in store, Flora Tristan decides to include a detailed description of how to set up the organisation of the "*Palais*" even though, from the outset, she claims

that her plan is not definitive and that the final details will sort themselves out in the actual process:

C'est lorsqu'on est à l'oeuvre , et seulement alors , qu'il est possible de bien apprécier les moyens les plus propres à faire réussir l'entreprise. Union Ouvrière p.71

She realises that the discrepancies which had existed in her contemporaries' elaborate plans, and their inability to actually implement them, could also appear in her own scheme, so she is at pains to make her plan as simple and as appealing as possible.

In answer to the question:

Mais comment nous unir pour cette grande oeuvre? Union Ouvrière p.6

Flora Tristan explains how it is possible to unite without actually meeting or "associating". This is an essential part of her propaganda, to show the workers how they could unite, even though they were scattered all over France in different occupations, coordinating their struggle by way of an organisation. She was not the first to think of such a possibility; she did go some way to acknowledging the ideas of Perdiguier and Moreau for a united workers movement. However, she claimed to be the first to recognise the importance of reaching as wide an audience as possible with such a message:

... j'ai compris que si je me bornais à mettre mon projet d'UNION UNIVERSELLE sur le papier , tout magnifique qu'il est, ce projet serait lettre-morte , comme il a été de tant d'autres plans déjà proposés. Union Ouvrière p.9

Flora Tristan recognised that if the vast majority of workers could neither read nor write, it was vital to have direct contact with them. In this, Flora Tristan anticipated the future mode of development of workers' organisations in France, designed to collect large sums of money for funds. Unfortunately, this method of campaign was also to include the seeds of destruction of socialist feminism, as shall be seen later.

Using existing societies, unions and federations to start with, committees of seven members (five men and two women) should be formed. Their task: not to collect subscriptions but to enrol members and build a register of the name, age, sex, profession and place of residence of workers; to be enrolled they had to prove they were workers:

... nous entendons par ouvrier et ouvrière tout individu qui *travaille de ses mains* n'importe comment. Ainsi les domestiques, les portiers, les commissionnaires, les laboureurs et tous gens dits *de peine*, seront considérés comme ouvriers. Union Ouvrière p.74

Flora Tristan calculated that as well as the *twenty five million* unskilled workers in France, there were also seven million skilled workers who, propertyless, were also deprived of their rights and would be entitled to join the *Union Ouvrière*:

La classe ouvrière n'est pas la seule qui ait à souffrir des privilèges de la propriété : les artistes, les professeurs, les employés, les petits commerçants et une foule d'autres gens, même les *petits rentiers*, qui ne possèdent aucune propriété, comme terres, maisons, capitaux, subissent fatalement les lois faites par les propriétaires siégeant à la Chambre. Union Ouvrière p.18

Armogathe and Grandjonc state that there are difficulties of text analysis of Union Ouvrière because of the way Flora Tristan confuses two notions of class: one, the socio-economic phenomenon of class gradually formed over the period necessary for the evolution of the economy to produce a new class, such as the working class, and two, the shorter, medium, or long term length of time of political takeover by one class, such as 1789 for the bourgeoisie. The ambiguities stem from the fact that Flora Tristan is using the term "class" on different levels and that she was calling into action a class which was in the very process of coming into being.(27) By including the broader category of workers, Flora Tristan was aware of the process of proletarianisation which has continued until the present, associating elements of the *petit bourgeoisie* with the working class.

Using the example of the impoverished Irish, who succeeded in amassing a vast amount of wealth to finance Daniel O'Connell, Flora Tristan suggested that a contribution of two francs per person per annum would be sufficient to give the organisation status and to build immediately. From the seven million skilled (and therefore better off) workers in France (of whom two million were women), fourteen million francs was a large sum in 1843. If support from the broader section of society of the twenty five million unskilled citizens is also enlisted, a much greater fortune could be amassed. With such a sum of money, the workers' union could achieve a considerable degree of poverty alleviation.

In forming such an organisation, Flora Tristan is much concerned with the pressure which it could bring to bear on officialdom and on employers:

... pour fixer l'attention générale sur la justice d'une réclamation , il faut avant tout se mettre en position de pouvoir parler avec assez d'autorité pour se faire écouter.  
Union Ouvrière pp.20-21

But for all the talk of solidarity and rights, Flora Tristan advocated that the union should be represented by one person in parliament - a rather weak proposal given the strength of the rhetoric.

This leads to the question of Flora Tristan's view of the changing relations between the classes as a result of the improvement of the condition of the working class brought about by the *Union Ouvrière*. This question will now be discussed.

### (c) Class Collaboration

In the preceding section, the emphasis on solidarity was discussed. This concerned relations between members of one class - the working class. How Flora Tristan interpreted the links this union of workers would have with the outside world is also important. One such link was very narrow and even authoritarian in scope - the link forged by the leader. Flora Tristan envisaged that the leader of the *Union Ouvrière* would appear in parliament and plead the union's case. Placing all responsibility for political representation upon one individual would

suggest that the workers would not be entitled to equal political rights after all. This suggestion by Flora Tristan reflects the almost obsessive interest she took in Daniel O'Connell's so called success story.(28)

There is no doubt in Flora Tristan's mind about the success of O'Connell and the desirability of imitating his tactics of organisation. Suggestion for concentrating representation on one person seemed to be the key to his success. Flora Tristan's message simplifies that story to the barest essentials. The Irish paid all of what they had collected to their leader who had offered his services for their cause. Small sums had mounted up. The French workers are not as badly off as the Irish, at least the male ones; surely there would be no objection to contributing to *Union Ouvrière*:

La position de la classe ouvrière en France ne peut se comparer en rien à la cruelle position du peuple irlandais ... Chez nous , au moins en principe , et c'est beaucoup , il n'y a plus d'esclaves devant la loi , du moins parmi la population mâle. *Union Ouvrière* p.21

Incidentally, we have here the very first reference to women's oppression in *Union Ouvrière*.

Once a solid union of workers is formed, the first task is to bring pressure to bear on the state, in the same manner that other collective bodies such as the *Union Coloniale* or the *Union Royaliste* have followed:

L'avantage dont jouissent tous les grands corps constitués , c'est de pouvoir compter pour quelque chose



dans l'Etat , et à ce titre d'avoir à *se faire représenter*.  
Union Ouvrière p.28

If the workers have amassed a vast amount of money for their organisation, they will be able to afford to pay someone to represent them to demand in parliament that the state listens to them:

Ouvriers , songez bien à ceci ; la première chose dont vous ayez à vous occuper , c'est de vous faire représenter devant la nation. Union Ouvrière p.28

This representative should be carefully chosen and should be concerned only with obtaining:

*Pour tout individu* LE DROIT AU TRAVAIL; et, *en vue du bien-être de tous et de toutes*, l'ORGANISATION DU TRAVAIL.  
Union Ouvrière p.29

The *Union Ouvrière* thus needs a leader prepared to work hard on its behalf. France has had plenty of illustrious generals and artists. She should be able to produce someone of "O'Connell" calibre. The *Union Ouvrière* should choose someone worthy and capable, and pay him a large salary. The leader will need a large salary for expenses, but would be answerable to a committee.

This very modest proposal as a solution for representation for the workers is due more to the considerable influence of the non-egalitarian socialism of the Saint-Simonians on Flora Tristan than to any definitive solution well thought out by her. It is an illustration of that indifference to egalitarianism in politics which is common to many

utopian socialists. Moral regeneration of the whole working class was to them a much more important objective than political equality. This is borne out by Thibert.(29)

It is nevertheless surprising to see Flora Tristan embrace political inequality. She had seen the Chartists at work campaigning for manhood suffrage, paid members of parliament, annual elections and secret balloting, all of which were demanded in the name of the labouring classes. Her assumption seemed to be that the working class was worth no more than one representative in the *Assemblée Nationale* and was doomed to remain in an inferior position.

Moon states that Flora Tristan's suggestion for one worker representative was her alternative to the limited franchise demands on the one hand by the bourgeois feminists, and the universal male suffrage demands on the other hand by the workers involved in the publication *Atelier*.(30) This in itself cannot be accepted as a valid explanation. There was no evidence that she was seeking a compromise; her point was that political equality was insufficient to ensure emancipation. In effect, this was proved by the fate of these bourgeois limited franchise demands much later in the century. Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroin campaigned for universal suffrage in 1848, but to no avail.

Having one representative for a whole class would suggest that this method did not contain the seeds of destruction of the old system. The political institutions of France in 1843, the power base of the bourgeoisie, would not be threatened or destroyed. Although emancipation

of the proletariat is the ultimate aim, in the short term, Flora Tristan does not expect the workers to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the class which came to power in 1789 and which uses political institutions for its own ends:

...le mandataire de l'UNION n'aura à s'occuper ni de questions politiques ni de questions religieuses.  
Union Ouvrière p.29

This chapter on the Tour de France shows just how much her experience would modify her views on this question.

Political egalitarianism is not therefore included in Flora Tristan's suggestions. The right to work is the central focus of her attention. The right to work, she believed, would have more appeal, as it is literally a "bread and butter" issue, rather than an abstract notion of equality before the law which did not bring an increase of happiness for the mass of citizens. This was the lesson for Flora Tristan when she moved away from Art, messianic feminism which appealed to humanity, petitions to the *Chambre des Députés*, and social observations, to formulating a programme of action for the workers which would be self reliant and to a certain extent autonomous from the State and from the bourgeoisie.

Ironically enough, five years after she was asking for one representative of the workers to be given one seat, universal manhood suffrage was introduced in France, a factor which many historians of

feminism reckon destroyed the potential alliance of women and the working class.(31)

The few benefits the workers subsequently gained through the parliamentary system of democracy suggest that Flora Tristan's aversion to politics was not entirely unfounded. Nevertheless, the way in which she placed sole responsibility for workers' representation or contact with the ruling class and their institutions on one individual would suggest that she expected the proletariat to remain in an inferior position in their relations with other classes. It will, however, be seen later in this chapter that egalitarianism returns in the Woman question.

Flora Tristan conceives of the links to be forged between the united working class and the other classes, not only in the narrow terms of a single political representative, but also in terms of a wider vision of class collaboration.

One of the accusations held against utopian socialists by scientific or Marxist socialists was their failure to understand the materialistic base of class antagonism and the lack of scientific understanding of the dialectical development of material historic forces. While it is not the intention of this thesis to defend Flora Tristan from attacks by Marxist socialists, it must be acknowledged that although she came very close to their position in her analysis of the class question, nevertheless she did have class collaboration featuring highly in her system of *Union*

*Ouvrière*. In Marxist terms, this implies weakness, utopianism and reformism.

As we have seen, Flora Tristan seemed content that the workers would remain inferior in status, albeit in improved conditions. By having but one representative in the *Chambre des Députés*, they would remain excluded from the power base of society. But she also looked towards the bourgeoisie, the rulers, to cooperate in any scheme of improvement of their inferiors, as inferiors they were most certainly regarded:

... les bourgeois voient à l'époque les pauvres comme des barbares ...(32)

One of the principal motives for Flora Tristan's conception of the role of the bourgeoisie in her scheme is the practical one of playing down the revolutionary nature of her system. In her appeal '*Aux bourgeois*', she begins by allaying their fears by disclaiming any notions of revolution:

Je veux qu'ils sachent bien que je ne suis pas une révolutionnaire, une anarchiste, une sanguinaire.  
Union Ouvrière p.113

It must be remembered that this is a brochure for direct action. The difficulty of presenting such a plan, faced with strict censorship of political activities, would warrant such a disclaimer.

Thibert and Puech both emphasise the peaceful nature of Flora Tristan's mission and stress her pacifist methods aimed at avoiding confrontation. This may be because they are concerned to defend her integrity as a respectable historic figure in order to establish her as a worthy academic topic. But the fact remains that Flora Tristan believed that the success of the proposed *Union Ouvrière* depended upon attracting the cooperation, not provoking the antagonism, of the upper classes.

Once the workers have formed their own union, they must appeal to outsiders for moral and practical support to obtain funds for their building programme and to gain recognition of the validity of their claims.

When giving guidelines for organising their movement, Flora Tristan suggests the workers should address themselves to the following categories:

Appel au Roi des Français *Union Ouvrière* (p.81)  
Au clergé catholique (p.83)  
A la Noblesse française (p.85)  
Au Chefs d'usines (p.86)  
Aux Financiers, aux Propriétaires et aux Bourgeois (p.87)  
Appel aux Femmes de tous les rangs, de tous les âges, de toutes les opinions, de tous les pays. (p.87)

Quite clearly she intends this exercise to have an educative effect on the workers themselves about class allegiances:

... à l'époque où nous vivons , il est très important pour la classe ouvrière de savoir au juste à quoi s'en tenir

sur la *sympathie* ou l'*antipathie* que lui vouent les autres classes de la société. Union Ouvrière p.80

There are two categories of *bourgeois*, states Flora Tristan, "*les sourds et les aveugles*" and "*les voyants*". (Union Ouvrière p.114-115)

"*Les voyants*" are the enlightened members of the bourgeoisie - those who are already convinced of the justice of the workers' cause. When she considers possible candidates for leadership of the *Union Ouvrière*, all are educated men from the enlightened bourgeoisie - from without the working class. Indeed, many times throughout her book, Flora Tristan appeals to this section of society for help in organising the workers into their self-help programme:

Vous tous enfin, ouvriers-poètes, écrivains, orateurs, musiciens, hommes et femmes d'intelligence et de bon vouloir, je vous fais ici un appel solennel. - Je vous somme, au nom de nos frères divisés et malheureux, - au nom de l'amour et de l'humanité, - au nom de *vous-mêmes*, - de prêcher en paroles et en écrits: L'UNION UNIVERSELLE DES OUVRIERS ET OUVRIERES. Union Ouvrière p.110

Flora Tristan considers herself to be of their number.

It is to the "*sourds*" and "*aveugles*" that she addresses her remarks in her appeal to convert them to her cause. She firstly reassures them of her respect for property. Then she goes on to warn them of the danger of insurrection if the workers are not granted their right to work and the right to education:

Supposons maintenant qu'on accorde au peuple ce que je demande pour lui : un défenseur; dès ce moment, plus de sociétés secrètes, plus d'émeutes. Aussitôt que le peuple sait qu'un homme honorable s'est chargé de le défendre et

qu'il s'en occupe activement, il attend avec patience et devient calme. Union Ouvrière p.118

Clearly, Flora Tristan is doing her utmost to lull the bourgeoisie into a state of calm and security about the prospect of a massive organisation of workers. Remarks and replies from individual *bourgeois* and socialist sympathisers included in the brochure would suggest that Flora Tristan wanted to inform the workers what the outsiders' reactions would be to *Union Ouvrière*.

In her introduction to the second edition where she analyses the reception of the first edition from the different classes, she includes the letters from well known would-be sympathisers. One from de Beaumont suggests to her that the best advocates for her worthy cause will be those who defend it without payment. Another letter from Considérant reminds her that:

... les bourgeois sont aussi des hommes, et il faut que l'émancipation du peuple se fasse plus intelligemment, plus sagement et plus chrétiennement que ne s'est faite celle de la bourgeoisie. Union Ouvrière p.xiv

A wealthy lady, signing herself "Amélie de D...", is enthusiastic about the "*Palais*" and is waiting for a lead from Flora Tristan to help in trying to raise the workers' self respect:

Voyez, Madame, c'est à vous, la créatrice de l'idée, à nous mettre à même de la servir. - Quant à moi, vous me trouverez toujours prête à travailler au bien de mes frères. Aussitôt que vous aurez organisé soit une société, un comité ou tout autre moyen d'action, je m'empresserai de mettre à votre service ma bonne volonté, mon activité et quelques ressources pécuniaires que je



serai heureuse de pouvoir offrir à une aussi bonne oeuvre.  
Union Ouvrière p.xvi

Eugène Sue stresses the importance of remaining within legality. (Union Ouvrière p.xvii) Flora Tristan also points out that while eighty-seven offers of help were received from men workers, only three women workers visited her and no women wrote to her, a disappointing outcome given her belief that the most important outsiders, for Flora Tristan, are wealthy women.

The success of the first edition and, more especially, the enthusiastic reception from the enlightened *bourgeois*, ready and willing to give material and moral support, causes Flora Tristan to attach some importance to enlisting their help in the preface to the second edition. It is on this basis that she is able to draw into her scheme women from outside the working class; not only that, but she has found a way of getting round their restricted role in society. She characterises her cause as the most respectable of her day.

A lengthy passage devoted to encouraging women from the wealthy classes to participate in collecting funds for the workers' movement reveals how well Flora Tristan understood their desire for an outlet for action.(33)

Flora Tristan was well aware that the Church, or rather acting on behalf of the Church, was one of the only forms of social action a woman could take. No other institution provided an outlet for action by

women who, as members of the wealthy classes, possessed an abundance of free time and a surfeit of energy to devote to a cause. This potential Flora Tristan wanted to tap for her cause. Indeed, she wants to make use of them in the same way that the Catholic Church uses women to collect and distribute alms:

*C'est aux femmes particulièrement que je m'adresse, parce qu'en l'état actuel des choses , elles peuvent servir la cause plus efficacement que les hommes. - Mais c'est aux femmes intelligentes et aimant Dieu et l'humanité que je fais cet appel. Union Ouvrière p.xviii*

She has seen how efficiently women can act for an organisation such as the Church; she believes that they could be usefully employed helping to create jobs. This would be a true act of "charité". Instead of being "les dames d'aumônes", they would be "les dames de charité".(Union Ouvrière p.xix) The former, working for the Church, can see no positive results, but the latter could help to eliminate poverty, the very cause of evils such as theft and prostitution, rather than trying to alleviate these symptoms. They could preach the duties and responsibilities of the rich towards the workers:

*... les femmes de charité iraient chez les riches leur démontrer qu'il est de leur devoir, de leur intérêt de travailler à extirper la misère, afin qu'il n'y ait plus ni prostituées ni criminels. Union Ouvrière p.xix*

Her economic proposals are remarkably like those twentieth century suggestions for the alleviation of famine and poverty in the Third World: give them tractors rather than bags of flour:

*Elles leur prouveraient , par des chiffres, qu'avec tout ce que la France donne en aumônes, pour être distribué en*

*secours individuels, dans chaque grenier isolément, on pourrait, en moins de trois ans, créer des travaux manufacturiers et agricoles sur une grande échelle, de manière à pouvoir procurer à tous et à toutes les moyens de vivre très-bien en travaillant. Union Ouvrière p.xx*

The right to work, which Flora Tristan is claiming for the workers as part of their 1789 heritage, is an appeal to the bourgeoisie couched within a sound moral ethic based on their own terms. Indeed, Flora Tristan has been accused of being puritanical in her obsession with finding something useful to keep the workers occupied.(34) In *Promenades dans Londres*, we may recall her similar attitude to the prisoners' enforced idleness. Flora Tristan is most insistent that the workers could be given something useful to do in exchange for money, instead of receiving alms, a medieval idea.

This short term practical idea is important because it includes women as actors. Indeed this is the only place that does so. At first glance it would appear that Flora Tristan was not presenting any radical way for women to act. If women are involved it is only because of their contribution towards class collaboration. *Union Ouvrière* can hardly be called feminist just for that! Recent research on women in associations, however, indicates that for 1844, what Flora Tristan was suggesting was exactly the extent of what the most humanitarian and philanthropic liberated wealthy women were to perform for most of that century:

A partir de la Monarchie de Juillet, et le phénomène ira s'accroissant jusque dans les années 80, ce qui aurait pu être un mouvement de philanthropie féminine inspiré par les « Lumières » va s'interrompre pour entrer dans une sorte de déclin. D'un côté avec l'émergence du catholicisme social et le développement de la philanthropie patronale, on va assister à une

prolifération d'oeuvres et d'institutions qui témoignent de l'attention d'une fraction de la classe dominante à la « misère d'origine industrielle », de l'autre, on constate une perte d'autonomie et d'initiative des femmes dans le domaine qu'elles étaient prêtes à s'annexer.(35)

Henceforth, an involvement in social good works - at first on an individual basis, then through voluntary organisations - was to grow and to become a considerable outlet for female expression, dominated largely by men and by the Church:

Certes la pratique de la bienfaisance chez les femmes de condition aisée est devenue une habitude sociale, mais elle s'exerce le plus souvent sous l'égide du curé dans les paroisses ou les bureaux de bienfaisance ou dans le cadre d'institutions dont « les hommes de bien » ont pris l'initiative.(36)

This potential female action was a prime form of energy Flora Tristan was anxious to use for her cause; she believed it could become socialist and feminist. In doing so, Flora Tristan pinpointed an important role for women that others were not slow to take advantage of and use to keep women confined to the role of benefactor, instead of actor.

Class collaboration, therefore, for Flora Tristan, was a means of massive job creation. This plan falls short of the overall reorganisation of the infrastructure which scientific socialists claimed was necessary to eliminate poverty. Providing jobs in attics was not the stuff of radicalism, but it did have the modest respectability necessary to motivate her audience.

Flora Tristan's assumption was that there were unlimited possibilities for job creation. Here there is no thought of supply and demand within the capitalist system, no thought of overall organisation of the means of production and infrastructure, no thought of the ownership of the means of production, no thought of how the capitalists would use lower and higher wages with increased and decreased unemployment according to their advantage.

Class collaboration for Flora Tristan was in the end a question of tactics. It enabled her to include women in her scheme. It gave her the cloak of respectability needed to continue with her propaganda activities. Above all, it did not disturb the social and economic system of French capitalism. It was reformism not revolution.

We now turn to Flora Tristan's feminism in Union Ouvrière.

### (3) A "1789" FOR WOMEN - CLASS, GENDER AND EQUALITY

In contrast to the development of the idea of class solidarity, we have seen that women are integrated in the project of *Union Ouvrière* by the call for class collaboration. This was not the only attempt to involve women. By demanding a "1789" for women, it will be shown here that equality is a vital element to link feminism and socialism, and represents the culmination of Flora Tristan's attempt to fuse the two.

Equality, the heritage of the eighteenth century, and the inspiration of 1789, was not always considered by Flora Tristan's radical contemporaries to be so important. After all, the Saint-Simonians justified class differences by insisting on the complementary roles of the industrialists and the workers. And, as Flora Tristan was to discover during her tour of France, some Marxist or scientific socialists, believing in the inevitability of dialectical materialism, denounced any idealistic belief in egalitarianism for the common good of humanity as a bourgeois device for maintaining its hold on the proletariat:

Social-Democracy was older than Marxism, and its first manifestations did not gain the plaudits of either Marx or Engels. A perusal of their correspondence is enough to show what an unflattering opinion they held of its leaders and programmes.(37)

In a rather original way, Flora Tristan, who considered equality the most important achievement of the revolution, used the political rhetoric of the ideology of 1789 (equality for all for the common good) to show that this revolution had not yet been fulfilled as long as women were in an inferior position.

She suggests that there is no doubt that the country was much better off in every way after the granting of equal rights to all its male citizens:

Puis, comme par enchantement, il surgit en foule, des rangs des prolétaires, des savants, des artistes, des poètes, des écrivains, des hommes d'Etat, des financiers qui jetèrent sur la France un lustre que jamais elle n'avait eu. Union Ouvrière p.49

Using the same argument, she appeals to men to liberate women, not just within the working class, but all women:

Ce qui est arrivé pour les prolétaires est, il faut en convenir, de bon augure pour les femmes lorsque leur 89 aura sonné. Union Ouvrière p.49

The assumption on Flora Tristan's part was that working class men would be willing to undergo a complete change of attitude, and that this would suffice to effect true emancipation of all women, not just those of their own class. The discovery of later feminists was that the patriarchal system was so entrenched as to be able to resist such demands. This was enough to discredit any such assumption in a manner similar to the way the utopian socialists were derided for expecting the bourgeoisie to be willing to emancipate the class enemy.

Flora Tristan's appeal to men to emancipate women was not simply for the sake of women. Doubtless she would be much less interesting had this been the case. She appealed to men to demand emancipation for women in order to improve the position of their own class, the working class. Flora Tristan combines two important premises of the utopian socialist ideal of the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists, namely that woman was the moral salvation of all humanity and if there was an emancipation of the working class, the moral salvation of humanity would be assured. Her originality, as Thibert and Moon rightly indicate,(38) lies in her fusion of these two premises.

The working class had benefitted to some extent from the 1789 revolution in that for the first time, certain basic political and social rights were secured:

Le prolétaire, lui, pauvre ouvrier regardé jusque-là comme une *brute*, fut bien surpris en apprenant que c'était l'oubli et le mépris qu'on avait fait de ses droits qui avaient causé les malheurs du monde. - Oh! il fut bien surpris d'apprendre qu'il allait jouir de droits civils, politiques et sociaux, et qu'enfin il devenait l'égal de son ancien seigneur et maître. Union Ouvrière p.48

The important thing is the recognition that individuals have basic civil claims. Accurate details about the lack of equal voting rights in 1789 are not present. No mention is made of the 1843 system of restricted franchise. What is of interest is the historic process of transformation of society. Flora Tristan draws an exact parallel with the class alliance which occurred during the revolution between the bourgeoisie and the lower classes, and the potential alliance that now exists between the proletariat and women. In both cases the unwitting ally is passive. The lower classes found themselves better off after the revolution which had for the most part been directed and controlled by the bourgeoisie. They did not play an active part in overthrowing the *Ancien Régime*. Similarly, women are not expected to play an active part in their emancipation as they have no way of throwing off their own oppression. Applying the principles of 1789 to women will release them from slavery just as it did for:

... les PROLETAIRES". - Avant 89, qu'était le prolétaire dans la société française? - Un vilain, un *manant*, dont on faisait une *bête de somme taillable et corvéable*. - Puis arrive la révolution de 89, et tout-à-coup voilà les sages des sages qui proclament que la *plèbe* se nomme *peuple*,



que les *vilains* et les *manants* se nomment *citoyens*.  
Union Ouvrière p.47

In granting women equal rights, society as a whole will be all the wealthier:

D'après un calcul fort simple, il est évident que la richesse croîtra indéfiniment le jour où l'on appellera les femmes (la moitié du genre humain) à apporter dans l'activité sociale leur somme d'intelligence , de force et de capacité. Union Ouvrière p.49

In the same way that the *prolétaire* counted for less than nothing before 1789, before the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Flora Tristan tells them that women are today considered as inferiors in society.

Jusqu'à présent, la femme n'a compté pour rien dans les sociétés humaines. Union Ouvrière p.44

However, within the working class family, women played a much less unequal role. In sharp contrast to the official suppression of women's rights by the Church and State, (on the grounds that women have always been inferior) Flora Tristan claimed that however much a *pariah* she might be in society at large, in the working class, the woman fulfilled a central function:

Dans la vie des ouvriers, la femme est tout. - Elle est leur unique providence. - Si elle leur manque, tout leur manque. Union Ouvrière p.51

However Flora Tristan asks the workers:

Cependant quelle éducation, quelle instruction, quelle direction, quelle développement moral ou physique reçoit la femme du peuple? - Aucun. Union Ouvrière pp.51-52

If the condition of women in the working class could only be improved, as Flora Tristan suggests it should be through education, the whole class would stand to benefit. Hence Woman, the source of the moral salvation of humanity in Saint-Simonian thinking, becomes in Flora Tristan's scheme the salvation of the working class. Thus the emancipation of women becomes the corner-stone for her whole project.

As indicated earlier, it is generally agreed that Flora Tristan's central objective was to succeed in combining feminism and socialism, thereby creating a practicable ideal, a valid form of feminist socialism. If she does succeed, it is in Union Ouvrière that this occurs. Finding a neat solution, or synthesis, however, was not to guarantee success. The assumption that there will be a gradual development of a harmony between feminism and socialism, a formula to make both come true all at once, is too simplistic. The weaknesses of Flora Tristan's synthesis are all too plain to see.

Firstly, Flora Tristan's appeal to men fell on deaf ears. Secondly, the vital question of implementing equal economic, political, civil and social rights was ignored. Thirdly, Flora Tristan still placed women fairly and squarely in the bosom of the family.

Nevertheless, Flora Tristan's scheme to include feminism in a working class based movement was interesting and attractive. Her

argument was that there could be no socialism without feminism. Her experience was that women could not be the instruments of their own liberation. Women needed the spearhead of the working class movement just as the bourgeoisie had provided one in the 1789 revolution.

On the one hand, Flora Tristan based her appeal to the working class to emancipate women on 1789, on the basis of equality of rights: a universal principle was to be applied within one class. On the other hand, this egalitarianism did not extend beyond that class. It was not used in any demand for political equality of classes. Without this egalitarian ingredient, the input of feminism in Union Ouvrière would be negligible.

The question remains, however, as to precisely what role women would play in the Union Ouvrière - in particular, what is the proper relation between male and female workers?

The most obvious and immediately striking feature about Union Ouvrière is the fact that Flora Tristan goes to great trouble to mention male and female workers when addressing her remarks to them. Women and men are to be on the same economic footing within the working class. Flora Tristan explains why when she begins her Chapter III of Union Ouvrière by indicating this:

Ouvriers, mes frères ... il y va pour vous de vos *intérêts matériels* à bien comprendre *pourquoi* je mentionne toujours les femmes en les désignant par : *ouvrières* ou *toutes*.  
Union Ouvrière p.43

Indeed this chapter, which is entitled '*Le POURQUOI je mentionne les Femmes*', amounts to one quarter of the whole of *Union Ouvrière*. However, in the prefaces to the second and third editions, there is no mention of "*ouvrières*" or "*toutes*". This is a highly significant discrepancy between what was written before, and what was written during, her *Tour de France*. As we shall see in Chapter Six, there was pressure to narrow her audience to *ouvriers*.

The section on women in *Union Ouvrière* is nothing short of a lesson to the workers on how women are oppressed. Flora Tristan might be careful to mention *ouvrières* with *ouvriers*, but this section does not refer to women. It is addressed to working men. We have seen that 1789 is the key to showing workers the benefits they have gained, for measuring its incomplete achievements (since women are as yet deprived of any benefits), and for suggesting the further benefits the workers could enjoy if their women had equal rights.

Details of the proposed organisation of the *Union Ouvrière* suggest that Flora Tristan created a structure not unlike modern trade unions and political parties. She did not expect working class women to play a fully equal part in their running, simply because working class women were very badly educated. This was a transitory situation which she hoped to change with the implementation of the benefits of the "*Palais*".

Si je n'admets pas dans les comités un nombre égal de femmes et d'hommes, c'est parce qu'il est constaté qu'aujourd'hui les femmes ouvrières sont beaucoup moins *instruites* et moins *développées* intellectuellement que les hommes ouvriers. - Mais il est bien entendu que cette inégalité ne sera que *transitoire*. *Union Ouvrière* p.73

Women needed positive discrimination to be encouraged. By her own definition, women in the working class are doubly oppressed, oppressed by capitalism and by the male order:

Pauvres ouvrières! elles ont tant de sujets d'irritation! D'abord le mari. ... Le mari ayant reçu plus d'instruction, étant *le chef de par la loi*, et aussi *de par l'argent* qu'il apporte dans le ménage, se croit (et il l'est de fait) bien supérieur à la femme, qui, elle, n'apporte que le petit salaire de sa journée, et n'est dans la maison que la très humble servante. Union Ouvrière pp.53-54.(39)

Modern feminists have searched for alternative structures to avoid this danger of one gender being excluded from positions of power. The lessons of past experience within left wing organisations have proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that women are just as likely to be excluded from decision-making processes on the left as on the right, unless the power structure is expressly designed to protect them.

There is also the problem of getting the women interested in the first place. In the practical details of creating the committees at a local and central level for the organisation, one of the first lessons for Flora Tristan, one that she readily acknowledges while trying to form *Union Ouvrière*, is the fact that women workers are not as interested or as sympathetic to the cause. She mentions the disproportionate number of replies from men and women workers to illustrate the gap. This confirms her opinion that the *ouvrières* are not ready for involvement. Egalitarianism in principle is not always easy to put into practice. And, as Flora Tristan herself was to witness in her travels around France, the gender division of roles was to become

an integral part of the capitalist division of labour. The consequences of this new form of oppression for feminism and socialism shall be discussed further in chapter seven.

Equality between men and women members of the working class is a crucial aspect of Flora Tristan's appeal on behalf of women. What of the role of bourgeois women in the *Union Ouvrière*? A distinction is made by Flora Tristan between male and female members of the bourgeoisie. One gender is oppressed, the other is not:

Femmes, quelle mission remplissez-vous dans la société? - Aucune. *Union Ouvrière* pp.88-89

Women from wealthy classes are expected to contribute to the movement in a particular way suited to their own limited means, limited because of the nature of their oppression. An alliance is possible between women across the class barrier in the name of "*les droits de la femme*":

Femmes, L'UNION OUVRIERE a droit à votre gratitude. C'est elle la *première* qui a reconnu *en principe* les droits de la femme. Aujourd'hui *votre cause* et la sienne deviennent donc communes. *Union Ouvrière* p.88

There are for Flora Tristan two classes of women:

Femmes riches, supprimez toutes ces frivolités de toilette qui absorbent des sommes énormes, et sachez employer plus *utilement* et plus magnifiquement votre fortune. Faites des dons à L'UNION OUVRIERE.  
Femmes du peuple, faites vous membres de L'UNION OUVRIERE. Engagez vos filles, vos fils à s'inscrire sur le livre de l'UNION. *Union Ouvrière* p.89

All however can unite around *Union Ouvrière*:

Femmes de toute la France, de toute la terre, mettez votre gloire à vous faire hautement et publiquement les défenseurs de l'UNION. *Union Ouvrière* p.89

Indeed gender is the principal means whereby class barriers can be overcome:

Elle mise sur le travail politique des femmes bourgeoises, instituées comme *relais* entre la classe possédante et le monde ouvrier.(40)

The manner in which Flora Tristan associates feminism and socialism through egalitarianism has been discussed with reference to the direct appeal to men for a change of attitude and to the involvement of women, both working class and bourgeois, in the creation of the organisation. Much can be gleaned from the way she portrays oppression of women; significantly, more attention is paid to details of female oppression than to details of class oppression in *Union Ouvrière*. The voice of bitter experience speaks when it comes to describing domestic quarrels, drinking habits of husbands:

Après les cuisants chagrins causés par le mari, viennent ensuite les grossesses, les maladies, le manque d'ouvrage et la misère, la misère, qui est toujours là plantée à la porte comme la tête de Méduse. *Union Ouvrière* pp.58-59

The value of *Union Ouvrière* is that it contains a programme for action where, although women are not in the main thrust of the action,

they are the focus of a consciousness raising exercise by exhibiting the extent and character of women's oppression.

So far, we have seen that the aims of Union Ouvrière were: firstly, to form an indissoluble unity of the working class: secondly, to collect a voluntary contribution from each worker and thus make the working class the owner of capital: thirdly, to conquer the problem of job creation with the help of the organisation's representative and resources, and fourthly, to use this power to build "*Palais*" which would provide practical services for the sick, unemployed and old, and to give the children of the working class a proper education on a national basis to make them into intelligent, rational, skilled adults.

It is in the organisation of the "*Palais*" that Flora Tristan produces her practical suggestions for the emancipation of women. Women workers are to be admitted on the same basis as men, whether they be sick, old or young.

The vicious circle of oppression so vividly portrayed by Flora Tristan of the young girl brutalised by her family, who in turn becomes a harsh mother, is to be broken by education. (Union Ouvrière pp.52-53)

Education was in fact the most important practical immediate item on her agenda to ensure future equality in society and to emancipate women:

Il résulte de cette position qu'il serait de la plus haute importance, au point de vue de l'amélioration intellectuelle, morale et matérielle de la classe ouvrière,



que les femmes du peuple reçussent dès leur enfance une éducation rationnelle, solide, propre à développer tous les bons penchants qui sont en elles, afin qu'elles pussent devenir des ouvrières habiles dans leur métier, de bonnes mères de famille capables d'élever et de diriger leurs enfants ... et afin qu'elles pussent servir aussi d'*agents moralisateurs* pour les hommes sur lesquels elles ont action depuis la naissance jusqu'à la mort.  
Union Ouvrière p.62

Apart from taking in equal numbers of boys and girls in the schools in the "*Palais*" and identical education for both, there are, however, no practical suggestions for the implementation of Flora Tristan's demand for absolute equality:

Commencez-vous à comprendre, vous, hommes qui criez au scandale avant de vouloir examiner la question, pourquoi je réclame des *droits pour la femme*? - pourquoi je voudrais qu'elle fût placée dans la société sur un pied d'égalité *absolue* avec l'homme, et qu'elle en jouit en vertu du *droit légal que tout être apporte en naissant*?  
Union Ouvrière p.62

The education programme is therefore crucial in her analysis of women's oppression, both within and outside family life, as it was the most important practical lesson for the workers. Beyond this, there is no elaboration of the principle of equality as an immediate end to women's oppression because Flora Tristan realised it required more than the passing of laws; there was no easy answer.

As a result, the reader is left in some confusion as to the question of female nature. In the same breath, Flora Tristan states that society is responsible for the inadequacies of working class mothers:

Femmes de la classe ouvrière, observez bien, je vous prie, qu'en signalant ici ce *qui* est touchant votre ignorance et

vosre incapacité à élever vos enfants, je n'ai nullement l'intention de porter *contre vous et votre nature* la moindre accusation. Non, c'est la société que j'accuse de vous laisser ainsi *incultes*, vous, femmes; vous mères, qui auriez tant besoin, au contraire, d'être instruites et développées, afin de pouvoir à votre tour *instruire et développer les hommes, enfants, confiés à vos soins*.  
Union Ouvrière p.53

and that women's true nature is exactly the opposite to what working class women are in reality:

Les femmes du peuple, en général, sont brutales, méchantes, parfois dures. - C'est vrai; mais d'où provient cet état de choses si peu conforme avec la nature douce, bonne, sensible, généreuse, de la femme?  
Union Ouvrière p.53

Either socio-economic conditions determine behaviour, which is what Robert Owen believed, or there is a constant human nature, in this case a female one, a rather romantic or Rousseauesque belief, in which case the corruptive influence of society hardly matters.

This raises the question of how Flora Tristan defined women. It would seem that she had a romantic view of womanhood, that nature had endowed females with capacities which determined their social role. The mother was responsible for the well-being of the family. Flora Tristan believed that women are "naturally" better parents than men. This has many implications for her view of the potential of women once emancipated; for instance she rarely questioned existing family structures.

Of course such a view has been severely criticised by feminists and socialists. The whole system of the nuclear family has been challenged both by radical feminists and scientific socialists. The feminists declare that women have never been able to be their true selves because of the existence of patriarchal society. The socialists declare that it is purely and simply socio-economic conditions under capitalism that cause women's oppression. This question of the cause of women's oppression is still raging within the Left today.(41) A dichotomy exists between those who claim it is capitalism, and with its disappearance women will be emancipated - this is the stance of the *Parti Communiste Français* - and those who believe that patriarchy runs deeper than capitalism, so it must be tackled separately from the class struggle.

The ambiguity in Flora Tristan's work could well be that she believed both of these propositions. She cannot be labelled easily because she demanded rights for women (feminism) in the name of humanity (socialism):

Je réclame des droits pour la femme, parce que je suis convaincue que tous les malheurs au monde proviennent de cet oubli et mépris qu'on a fait jusqu'ici des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'être femme.  
Union Ouvrière p.62

#### (4) CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a discussion of Flora Tristan's choice of action - Union Ouvrière - has shown that the synthesis of her feminism and socialism depended ultimately on implied equality between men and women, both within this proposed working class organisation for self improvement and in the labour market. It has also been seen that Flora Tristan's feminism was very much limited by her view of the role of women within the family structure and within the confines of a working class organisation, with little reference to the relationship of the sexes in the division of labour.

Flora Tristan's prime concern was to consider the condition of the working class as her priority and not any other "sub-group" such as women. This did not prevent her from using the political rhetoric of 1789 to show that this revolution had not yet been fulfilled so long as women were in an inferior position. Using the same argument, she appealed to men to liberate women within the working class.

It has been seen that the very important question of social and economic equality was not much discussed, but women workers were expected to have the same rights as men. Had Flora Tristan's view of the family been a radically different one, she might have stressed the issue much more than she did.

As shall be seen in the following chapter, it was on this rather contentious issue that Flora Tristan ran into trouble, not only with men

but also with the establishment. Furthermore, it has significant bearing on her legacy for modern feminism and socialism. One way of assessing Flora Tristan's radicalism in feminist terms is to study how far she wanted to change traditional roles within the family and the work force. Feminists judge progress by the amount of personal freedom gained by women from the confines of the family; unless one reads much between the lines on the implications of her egalitarianism, on that score, Flora Tristan fails rather seriously. Socialists judge by the degree of importance attached to the class struggle displayed by an author; on that score, Flora Tristan also fails, although in *Tour de France* she does alter her view of the class struggle.

This is the subject of the following chapter.

## Footnotes to Chapter Five

- 1 Lettres/Flora Tristan réunies, présentées et annotées par Stéphane Michaud (Paris: Seuil, 1980) p.243
- 2 Fernand Rude, 'Eugénie Niboyet' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, pp.120-143 (p.128)
- 3 Lettres/Flora Tristan, p.69
- 4 "Dédicace aux classes ouvrières". Promenades dans Londres Bédarida edition, p.47. See also François Bédarida's notes on Owen, pp.317-337
- 5 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.5
- 6 S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', p.28
- 7 Laure Adler, A l'aube du féminisme: les premières femmes journalistes
- 8 Deborah Pope, The Development of Feminist Consciousness in Women's Writing in France in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, chapters 2 and 3
- 9 See page 179
- 10 See G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Volume 1: 'The Forerunners 1789-1850' (London: Macmillan, 1953), pp.183-188, also Daniel Armogathe and Jacques Grandjonc, 'L'Union Ouvrière de Flora Tristan', pp.109-110
- 11 Laure Adler, 'Flora, Pauline et les autres', pp.194-196
- 12 Claire Goldberg-Moses, The Evolution of Feminist Thought in France 1829-1899, Unpublished PhD thesis, George Washington University, 1978, p.134
- 13 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.284
- 14 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée, p.223
- 15 Paul Corcoran, Before Marx: Socialism and Communism in France 1830-1848, p.9
- 16 Paul Corcoran, Before Marx: Socialism and Communism in France 1830-1848, p.10
- 17 Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, p.313

- 18 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée, p.223
- 19 Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, p.116
- 20 Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, pp.316-317
- 21 Dominique Desanti, La Femme Révoltée, p.229
- 22 See Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, p.318
- 23 Jules-L. Puech, La Vie et L'Oeuvre de Flora Tristan, p.130
- 24 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.235
- 25 See the introduction to the re-edition of Union Ouvrière by Daniel Armogathe and Jacques Grandjonc (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1986) pp.32-33
- 26 For further works by Perdiguier, see his Mémoires d'un Compagnon (Paris: Maspéro, La Memoire du Peuple, 1982) and Livre du Compagnonnage (Paris: Lafitte Reprints, 1985)
- 27 Daniel Armogathe and Jacques Grandjonc edition of Union Ouvrière, p.35
- 28 Just as the utopian socialists' schemes, among them Union Ouvrière, were dismissed in their entirety by the scientific socialists for their "failure" to come to grips with the class question, O'Connell himself was to become a controversial figure among Irish nationalists in the manner in which he failed to tackle the question of Irish sovereignty.
- 29 Marguerite Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme français, pp.308-311
- 30 S. Joan Moon, 'Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan', p.39
- 31 See Michèle Riot-Sarcey, 'La conscience féministe des femmes de 1848: Jeanne Deroin et Désirée Gay' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, pp.157-165
- 32 Laure Adler, 'Flora, Pauline et les autres', p.196
- 33 On the condition of women and social habits see James McMillan, Housewife or Harlot. On women and charity organisations see Hazel Mills' 'Public and Private: Perceptions of Legitimate Female Activity in France ca.1830 to ca.1850', unpublished paper read at French History Conference, University of Liverpool, 1 to 3 April, 1987
- 34 See Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.315

- 35 Danièle Rancière, '*La philanthropie au féminin*' in *Penelope*, no.11 (automne 1984), pp.65-70 (p.67)
- 36 Danièle Rancière, '*La Philanthropie au Féminin*', p.67
- 37 George Lichtheim, *Marxism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) p.90
- 38 See Marguerite Thibert, '*Féminisme et Socialisme d'après Flora Tristan*' and S. Joan Moon, '*Feminism and Socialism: the Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan*'
- 39 The idea of double exploitation is succinctly put in the words « *l'homme le plus opprimé peut opprimer un être qui est sa femme. Elle est la prolétaire du prolétaire même ...* » attributed to Flora Tristan in Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Le grief des femmes: anthologie de textes féministes*, vol.1: '*du moyen âge à 1848*'. (Paris: Editions Hier et Demain, 1978) p.255, although as François Bédarida, in his introduction to *Promenades dans Londres*, p.39, footnote 60, rightly points out, this might be an embellishment added by A. Constant when he published the posthumous work *L'Emancipation de la femme ou le testament de la Paria*
- 40 Daniel Armogathe, '*Flora Tristan, féministe et socialiste*', p.69
- 41 This debate is by no means particular to France. For an account of some of the issues, see works by writers Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell, Elizabeth Wilson, Zillah Eisenstein, among others.



## Chapter Six

### LE TOUR DE FRANCE: SOCIALISM AND FEMINISM

This chapter will examine the evidence in the diaries of Flora Tristan's role in the working class movement of the 1840s and assess the extent to which feminism is present.

#### (1) FLORA TRISTAN'S SOCIALIST ROLE IN THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS OF THE 1840s

##### (a) Style of Le Tour de France

The work under consideration here is a posthumous publication. The diaries were annotated firstly by Puech, then by Collinet, and then again by Michaud, who has indicated that it is extremely fortuitous that they survived at all.(1) After Flora Tristan's death, the handwritten manuscript was kept by Eléonore Blanc and her family. Her grandson handed the diaries over to Puech who then proceeded to annotate them and present his notes and the manuscript to the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam in 1939. Mislaid during the Second World War, they were only found again in 1970. Michel Collinet then published

Puech's edited work which very quickly went out of print. Most recently, Stéphane Michaud produced a further edition in 1980.

In fact only the careful annotation and preservation by Puech made possible the later editions and ensured that Flora Tristan's diaries received a good deal of attention, though more for marketing than for textual analysis.

In contrast to the contrived style and rigour of the brochure Union Ouvrière, Flora Tristan's diaries contain unstructured, random thoughts. The loose form of notes does not rule out coherence, however, because Flora Tristan fully intended to use her diaries for a work entitled Le Tour de France: Etat actuel de la classe ouvrière en France sous l'aspect moral, intellectuel et matériel. Indeed, from the very outset, she made it clear what she intended to do with this raw material:

Surchargée de travail comme je le suis en ce moment, je ne puis jeter ici que des notes - qui plus tard me serviront à faire l'ouvrage dont je mets ici le titre. Le Tour de France T.1 p.27

Furthermore, in an appendix, she had notes for the outline of her project. (Le Tour de France T.2 pp.229-236) Judging by her notes, the finished product would have had much the same layout and style, with more incidents developed into sketches, something rather like Promenades dans Londres.

Part of the unique style of this writer and seasoned traveller is an interest in all aspects of society, and as in her previous travelogues, the diaries are full of lively comments about her experiences:

Le journal de Flora, ses « notes devant servir à mon ouvrage : le Tour de France », gardent leur acerbe ironie.(2)

#### **(b) Contact with Workers**

Although her priority lay with forming *Union Ouvrière cercles*, Flora Tristan relished the challenge of meeting people from all walks of life.

Part One opens with a thirty-four page long account of Flora Tristan's meetings with workers' groups in Paris dated between 4 February and 16 April 1843. The significance of this period has already been discussed in the previous chapter on *Union Ouvrière*. Then come seven pages on her first tentative visit to Bordeaux in September 1843, the town where only one year later her voyage would come to an abrupt end. The diary is not kept continuously, as there are no further entries until her tour proper begins on 12 April 1844.

Flora Tristan visited towns of all dimensions, ranging from the small provincial town of Avallon to the most industrialized city of Lyon. Judging by the number of pages allocated to each centre, it is obvious that the length of her stay in each place varied: so too did the number of contacts in each town. These were determined as much by the size of

the centre as by the extent of political activity the workers were engaged in. There were towns where she could find no audience and where she felt ill at ease:

Cette petite ville d'Avallon a 6 000 âmes, elle est morte comme toutes les petites villes de provinces. - Je préférerais mourir dans le fond d'un cachot que de végéter ainsi dans la tranquillité d'une ville où il n'y a aucune activité. - J'ai placé là quelques livres chez les deux libraires. C'est des grains semés sur des pierres. Le Tour de France T.1 p.78

Flora Tristan saw little point in staying in Semur, another small town:

Là je suis resté trois heures mais je n'ai pas cherché à parler aux ouvriers. - Ceux que j'avais vus la veille m'avaient fait trop de mal. - Quand on veut aller loin il faut ménager ses forces. Le Tour de France T.1 p.78

Unsurprisingly, her comments were more incisive when her sojourns were longer.

Each experience was related to her *Idée*, her obsession of the urgent need to form *Union Ouvrière*. She was impatient with anything peripheral to her campaign. There was no time for visiting monuments for pleasure or for going to the theatre: if ever she did so she was ill at ease:

On jouait « La Juive » - représentation extraordinaire, bonne musique et bien exécutée. - Il ne m'est pas même venu l'idée de regarder une seconde, ni d'écouter une minute. - Qu'est-ce que l'art, grand Dieux, à côté de l'humanité ! Rien, mais absolument rien ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.24

She did find herself visiting churches in the manner that anyone passing through would do so, but saw no interest in that pastime:

Je donnerai la plus belle église de la chrétienté pour un ouvrier intelligent. Le Tour de France T.1 p.81

While her principal aim was to mobilise the working class, many of her comments were devoted to assessing the *rapport de force* between the classes. This was partly because, as she readily admitted, making contact with the working class was difficult for her, and, as a consequence, it was not such a time consuming matter. More often the workers' doors were closed to this outsider who came alone, independent of any organisation, asking them to adhere to what amounted to an illegal movement and activity. By contrast, access to public institutions such as churches, newspaper offices and bookshops was easy for an articulate intellectual such as herself, admittedly to a lesser extent when that person was acting on behalf of the workers:

Il faut que maintenant ceux qui travaillent pour le peuple fussent en dehors de la presse en dehors de la librairie - ou autrement ils sont étouffés. Le Tour de France T.1 pp. 66-67

Accordingly, Flora Tristan frequently paid visits to public places to advance her cause outside the working class.

So a secondary objective was to look for potential allies among the enlightened members of the upper classes. As we have seen in the previous chapter, class collaboration was a very deliberate tactic. Indeed, Flora Tristan was so enthusiastic about this aspect of her

project that she was convinced she would find support. When she experienced antagonistic reactions from the upper classes, far from being dismayed, she concluded that the movement had to be essentially self-emancipatory; in this manner even a negative response was helpful as it served to reveal to the workers their class enemy. As her trip progressed, Flora Tristan became particularly engrossed in this question.

A further purpose of Flora Tristan's was not so much dialogue or preaching but observation. Following on from her study of English society, she had a chance to probe further into the question of the condition of the nascent industrial class, this time in the French context.

She was only able to cover this topic, however, in places when the length of her stay permitted and where she was admitted to factories and workshops, usually with an escort:

Sortie ce matin dès 9 heures accompagnée d'un chef d'atelier pour aller à la Croix-Rousse visiter les ateliers les plus pauvres et les plus riches afin que le contraste puisse mieux me faire juger l'état réel de la classe des tisseurs. Le Tour de France T.1 pp.154-155

By her reactions, these came as shock; she had never dreamt that such poverty and exploitation could exist in France. It was as bad as the worst she had seen in England:

Mes visites aux tisserands pauvres. - Depuis ma visite au quartier des Irlandais en 1839 je n'avais pas éprouvé une journée aussi cruellement douloureuse que celle d'aujourd'hui. Le Tour de France T.1 p.154

As I have said earlier, Flora Tristan did not find workers easily. Dijkstra points out that there was a difference of class and culture between herself and the people she wished to get close to. This meant barriers existed which prevented communication. Proof of this can be found by analysing her meeting places. Flora Tristan was touring France when workers were beginning to organise in the workplace rather than in the community, thereby excluding outsiders. It is very significant that there were very few occasions recorded when she was admitted into working class homes. The only time this occurred was when the home was also the workplace as was the case for such as weavers or bakers. As a result, there was little description of the inside of a worker's home, and an equally slight amount on workers and their families. For one who claimed to have correctly analysed the family structure of the working class, one wonders from where she gained her insight. I would suggest that this lack of communication leaves a certain amount of ignorance in her perception of gender relations in the working class.

The discrepancy between her aims and her achievements is marked. Ideally, Flora Tristan was setting out to talk to workers about their emancipation, and that of women, but since the class divisions were almost impossible to overcome, she found herself in danger of being confined to her own class.

However, even when there were no contacts with workers, the manner in which she commented on the activities of the other classes serves effectively to illustrate her feelings of injustice inflicted on the

workers and her thirst for action. The visit to Lamartine's chateau illustrates this:

N'ayant pas d'ouvriers à voir ici et étant depuis trois jours malade à ne pouvoir marcher, je suis allée en voiture avec ces Messieurs du *Bien Public*, visiter la campagne de M. de Champvans et le château de M. de Lamartine, « Monceau ». Le Tour de France T.1 p.108

On this occasion she could gauge the views of three editors of a local newspaper; they were democrats. Thus we have her opinion of democrats' capacity for being the instruments of change:

Maintenant que j'ai vu cela de près, je prédis à coup sûr qu'ils ne seront jamais chefs de rien. - Ils manquent de ligne, de vigueur, car les idées ils pourraient les prendre chez moi ou ailleurs, mais l'idée ne suffit pas il faut savoir l'exécuter. Le Tour de France T.1 p.108

On other occasions, she made good use of meetings with local middle class socialists.

#### (c) Contact with Socialists and Labour Movements

Throughout her tour, Flora Tristan depended much more than she would have liked on socialist intellectuals such as the Saint-Simonians and workers' groups such as *Sociétés de Secours Mutuels*, often known as the Associationists, *Compagnons*, Cabetists or Icariens, and *Phalanstériens*. Considérant's paper and other organs of the socialist press in Paris had already announced her departure, and she also had



letters of introduction from individual Saint-Simonians or *Compagnons* such as Perdiguier.

Puech feels that very few people were on her side in the socialist world when she sets out, apart from Considérant. She herself was aware of her isolation, mainly, as we have seen in the previous chapter, because of political differences between herself and other groups:

Songez mon ami, que je pars *seule*, sans *aucun appui*, sans argent pour payer les journalistes de province pouvant faire la *réclame*; - que j'ai presque *tout le monde contre moi*. - Les hommes, parce que je demande l'*émancipation* de la *femme les propriétaires*, parce que je réclame l'*émancipation des salariés* ... *Lettres* p.195

However, in spite of these differences, contacts during her trip would seem to indicate that there was some mutual interest between the different sects; they acknowledged by acts of assistance that they had something valuable in common. At times the links seemed rather weak in Flora Tristan's opinion, but there were socialists who were willing to receive her. The generosity of the Lamonnier couple during her fatal illness in Bordeaux illustrates this. From evidence of her activity from September 1843 to April 1844, based upon correspondence, it would seem obvious that Flora Tristan spent the previous year successfully building up a network of contacts with the socialist and labour movements of the time. Wherever there were any fellow socialists, she exploited their services to the full:

Ici comme partout je trouve des républicains en grand nombre - mais je vois qu'à ceux-là aussi on peut faire entendre raison ... J'ai trouvé ici beaucoup de phalanstériens qui comme partout ne sont bons qu'à parler ... Il y a aussi deux ou trois saint-simoniens qui sont

restés partisans avoués de l'émancipation de la femme.  
- Avec ceux-là je puis m'entendre - bien qu'ils ne bougent pas, ils donnent un fameux coup d'épaule à la roue.  
- Enfin j'ai rencontré aussi des ouvriers socialistes, des gens d'un grand bon sens, ayant bon vouloir et tous m'ont promis de m'aider efficacement dans ma mission. Le Tour de France T.1 p.81

Fellow socialists, she realised, had their uses; in particular they could put her in touch with workers. She wrote of Saint-Simonian individuals, often in positions of power, such as *négociants*, or in one case as the private secretary to the *Préfet* in Lyon for whom she had a letter of introduction from Paris. She felt uneasy about contacting the Saint-Simonian in the *Préfecture* and turned away as if she could not bear to penetrate further into the inner sanctum of the establishment, yet no such inhibition prevented her from contacting industrialists and bishops.

The Saint-Simoniens were influential as individuals rather than as organised groups. The Saint-Simoniens were the ones most sympathetic to the question of the emancipation of women; Flora Tristan wondered if this was such a good thing; it tended to make them rather inert waiting for the female messiah to appear, and for this fault she continued to pour scorn on them. Her feeling was that they had outlived their usefulness:

Il a le tort des saint-simoniens, il attend. - Attend la venue de la femme, il sait que c'est elle qui doit sauver le monde, et lui, homme, il ne bouge plus. - Voilà le défaut des saints-simoniens, mais ce défaut est le résultat de leur foi en la femme. Le Tour de France T.1 p.89

As we shall see later, Flora Tristan had no qualms about using the vocabulary of Saint-Simonian feminism, but this did not prevent her from

pinpointing the passive nature of this way of thinking. Just as twentieth century revolutionary socialists claimed (until challenged by radical feminists) that emancipation of women would automatically ensue "after the revolution", the Saint-Simonians felt that socialism would come into being after the discovery of the female messiah, and that there was no point in attempting to implement piecemeal change before that.

Although Flora Tristan could see the weakness of this school of thought, she considered it worthwhile pursuing discussions:

Je considère que ces trois heures sont bien employées. *Le Tour de France* T.1 pp.88-89

This may indicate a desperation on Flora Tristan's part for sympathetic contacts of any description, or it may be a recognition of their common set of beliefs on the social question. Either way, however much the Saint-Simonians believed in the "*égalité absolue entre l'homme et la femme*" (*Le Tour de France* T.1 p.38) there is no evidence of discussions on this matter during her tour.

She mentioned Fourierists or *Phalanstériens* active both as individuals and as groups. They were more widespread and more numerous than the Saint-Simonians. They were willing to listen as a group and were helpful in a practical way - escorting her to meet workers, providing introductions - but she often found them lacking the courage of their convictions or inadequate in some way. In Saint-Etienne they failed to bring workers to meet her:

Vraiment c'est révoltant de voir le timoré et l'égoïsme de ces phalanstériens. M. Soubière qui est maître-tanneur, qui emploie et connaît des ouvriers, n'a pu encore m'en amener un. Je suis sûre qu'il a peur de se compromettre. Le Tour de France T.1 p.211

This incident reveals more about Flora Tristan's naïvety than the Fourierists failure. Why did the workers have to be brought to her hotel? The fact indicates just how wide the gap was between proselytiser and would-be proselytes.

In Lyon, the Fourierists were the most timid about associating with her for fear of risking trouble with the authorities. In disgust she referred to them as bourgeois, afraid of committing themselves:

En somme j'ai été très mécontente de ces patrons bourgeois fouriéristes. Je leur ai demandé leur coopération pour l'impression du petit livre, ils ne l'ont pas donnée disant pourtant qu'ils la donneraient. Avec eux rien ne se fait franchement et rondement - pas d'activité pas de vie, ces gens là vivent dans la mort. Le Tour de France T.1 p.168

Judging by Flora Tristan's account of socialists in 1844 France, Saint-Simonians and *Phalanstériens* originated from the bourgeoisie. The aim of Flora Tristan's tour of France, however, was to get beyond that circle of passive middle class utopians.

It was among activist workers of the French labour movement where Flora Tristan relished most the possibility of contacts and where she did the greater part of her preaching. She had high hopes of finding widespread support there. As she herself boasted in Promenades dans

Londres, because of the revolutionary tradition dating from 1789, the French proletariat was politicised and had begun to organise through membership of various organisations.

Here then were actual manual workers and artisans, especially useful to Flora Tristan because often they could summon meetings quickly in their headquarters (*chez la Mère*) and provide the facilities for meeting places. From prominent activists such as Perdiguier, with whom she had been in correspondence, she had learnt of the extent of rivalry between the different *Compagnons* and was pleased with herself on one occasion when she intervened to preach unity, not strife, and two *Compagnons* were reconciled with one another:

... je fis là de la fraternité en pratique ... Le Tour de France T.2 p.101

More significantly, on her tour she witnessed at first hand the changes in the fortunes of these workers. From her conversations with *les Mères*, Flora Tristan was in a position to comment on alterations in the structure of the labour market. She rightly observed that cheap labour from the country was undermining *Compagnon* wage rates and as a result the *Compagnons* were a dying breed in small towns:

La concurrence se faisant une guerre acharnée partout, les patrons ont diminué de jour en jour le prix de l'ouvrage, espérant ainsi enlever les pratiques du voisin. Le Tour de France T.1 p.106

The rural workers were resented because they accepted lower wages and did the same job badly:

Ces petits ouvriers de la campagne ont reçu le nom de « carmagnoles » en signes de mépris. Le Tour de France  
T.1 p.107

This was to be the fate of countless skilled craftsmen and artisans in the industrialisation process during the nineteenth century. It led some socialists, including Flora Tristan, to consider that competition was the greatest evil of capitalism:

J'ai un bel article à faire là-dessus, faisant voir que cette concurrence et ces carmagnoles nous ramènent droit en barbarie, sauvagerie, etc., etc. Le Tour de France  
T.1 p.107

Flora Tristan saw how these developments left the *Compagnons* much weakened. Young skilled workers had found it easy to fend for themselves in securing their own employment because of the development of new industries such as mechanical engineering:

Pour qu'éclate l'organisation compagnonnique il fallait en effet à la fois que la situation sur le marché du travail déborde les compagnons et leur interdise le contrôle de l'embauche qui faisait leur principe force matérielle, et que l'atmosphère politique encourage une réflexion de type libéral contre l'archaïsme autoritaire de l'institution.(3)

As a result, the *Compagnons* were more receptive to her suggestion for *Union Ouvrière* than would otherwise have been the case. Rather than try to preserve the *Compagnonnage* in some way, as Perdiguier was suggesting, Flora Tristan hoped to entice them into her new scheme of self protection.

However, new associations were already forming to take the place of the *Compagnons*. The *Compagnonnages* became increasingly marginal after 1830. Before then they had been prominent in the building trade and had served mainly as a protective insurance and employment association for their own members. But after 1830, the mutual aid societies began to take their place:

The July Monarchy saw the founding of over a thousand more mutual-aid and benefit societies (a prefectoral enquiry of 1852 established that 1088 had been founded in the eighteen-year period, compared to 377 for the years 1814-30, but these are low estimates based on incomplete returns).(4)

Flora Tristan had more to hope for from the *sociétaires de l'Union*, who were closest to her aspirations. In Auxerre, they all subscribed to her Union. In Mâcon, they were the only ones to come forward. They were the strongest group in Toulon among the munitions workers:

Partout je trouve les sociétaires bien mieux sous tous les rapports que les autres, et la raison c'est qu'ils font déjà partie de l'Union de tous les corps d'état. *Le Tour de France* T.1 p.105

Unfortunately, although we are told their trade, in this case *tonneliers*, there is no indication of their attitude to women. This is one of the main frustrations in reading the diaries; there is insufficient information on this question.

According to Judt, members of these societies would be entitled to free medical care and some payment during illness and convalescence in exchange for a monthly contribution of around one franc in the 1840s.

Political discussions were banned. Most societies excluded women; they would have had difficulty in paying anyway since they were paid half the men's rate. There were, however, some societies exclusively for women in Lyon and the Dauphiné region. On antagonism towards women workers, Judt writes:

It is particularly ironic that the feeling among printers, for example, should have been so strongly against women in their trade just at the moment (1845) when the *livret* was being extended to women workers.(5)

It would seem that Flora Tristan admired the *sociétaires* for reasons other than their feminism. When police repression was at its height, the *Compagnons* withdrew but the *sociétaires* stood firm:

Dans cette circonstance les *sociétaires* se sont parfaitement conduits, pas de crainte, pas d'hésitation, pas de bravade. - Ils ont été bien, très bien sous tous les rapports. Le Tour de France T.2 p.219

However much she admired the *sociétaires*, Flora Tristan rightly believed they were inadequate: their weakness lay in the fact that they were organised for defensive actions only - against wage cuts for example - but they could never have become a spearhead for collective action on a wider scale. They were too localised, and meetings in the workplace could not have fostered a feeling of solidarity among all workers, male and female, skilled and unskilled, in new and old industries. Here we see the symbolic importance of the "Palais" in Flora Tristan's scheme, away from the bar and workplace, a place where all would be admitted on equal terms.



The *sociétaires* were tolerated by the authorities so long as they did not engage in politics; Flora Tristan witnessed what happened if they did. Reception of her ideas was enthusiastic among some of the members; this was because socialism had already made inroads into the workers movement by the time Flora Tristan toured France, according to Judt. In other words, the extent of her success ultimately depended on previous work by fellow socialists and not in her *Idée* or in her powers of persuasion, as she would have liked to think:

Socialist propaganda and the activists who carried it all over France in these years were catalysts for sentiments which already existed across a wide spectrum of opinion.(6)

The group of socialists Flora Tristan felt least inclined to contact was the communist group, particularly the Cabetist or Icarien sect:

Le soir à 8 heures chez les communistes - voilà la première fois que je rencontre des hommes qui me sont tout à fait ennemis. Le Tour de France T.1 p.169

This form of socialism had footholds in Paris, Lyon and Marseille. Why did she oppose it? Flora Tristan was careful to distinguish between the collectivist communists, who wished to have a collective form of organisation and a communal way of life, and the Icariens, who espoused Cabet's teaching. She found that Cabet's idea of each worker having his own house and garden, where the authority of husband and father was enforced, was far too selfish:

En leur montrant un chacun chez soi propre et confortable, un petit jardin à soi seul, en conservant l'autorité du père et du mari, en leur donnant une patrie à soi et supérieure aux autres, un chef (un Icar) nommé

par eux et par conséquent devenant leur chose, il était sûr de plaire et de s'emparer de cette partie de la classe ouvrière qui est encore aveugle ou au moins très myope et n'y voit pas plus loin que son petit bien être personnel. Le Tour de France T.1 p.147

She did however recognise worthy qualities in collectivist communists:

J'ai le bonheur d'entendre tous les jours des ouvriers me dire ... Nous voulons que la terre ne forme plus qu'un grand et magnifique jardin pour tous, que l'humanité devienne une grande et même famille où chaque membre vive selon ses goûts et reçoive selon ses besoins. Le Tour de France T.1 p.147

She was suspicious of all the communists, however, as she disapproved of the doctrinaire effect they had on their supporters. She found that some workers spouted communist propaganda and were far too entrenched in their ideas. What she reproached the Cabetists in particular for was the same weakness that the other socialists were guilty of: immobilism:

Sous ce rapport M. Cabet a fait beaucoup de mal aux ouvriers, il a paralysé en eux toute action - aujourd'hui les ouvriers ne voient que le règne de l'Icarie, restent là fascinés devant cette vision. Ils attendent au lieu de travailler activement à préparer cet heureux règne. Le Tour de France T.1 p.134

The communist sect was the most feared by the authorities, by republicans, and, seemingly, by fellow socialists. According to Buffenoir there were two kinds of communism: violent and pacific. Those favouring secret societies, armed insurrection and revolutionary dictatorship, sometimes known as *babouvistes*, were popular until around 1840, when the

second kind, favouring collectivisation, communal organisation and more peaceful methods of acquiring the means of production, began to develop. Communists were much maligned.

The newspaper La Gazette is quoted by Buffenoir to illustrate the condemnation by the Catholic authorities:

... le communisme est une doctrine impossible, immorale, qui se rapproche de l'athéisme. ... Le communisme ... rendra les mariages temporaires, proscriera les professions libérales, forcera les banquiers à faire des souliers ou des chapeaux.(7)

The republicans were also acrimonious in their hostility towards communists, accusing them of failing to give support to the struggle against the monarchy. The reason for the communists' drift away from republicanism, of course, lay in the fact that the republicans refused to endorse social or economic reform:

Si les communistes se sont séparés des Républicains, ce n'est pas qu'ils en aient voulu à ceux-ci de faire la part des circonstances, c'est que Rittiez et les siens n'ont voulu ni introduire, ni discuter dans leur journal aucune idée sociale pour s'en tenir toujours exclusivement à leurs idées politiques.(8)

Not surprisingly, since she was allied to the communists on this issue, Flora Tristan found communists attending her meetings.

From her comments, it was clear that Flora Tristan had her finger on the pulse of the socialist movement, such as it existed in France at the time of her tour. She attempted to fuse the utopian socialists and

the already organised labour groups with the workers by drawing all sympathisers into her scheme. In the following section, the significance of this relationship between socialists and workers will be further discussed.

#### (d) *Flora Tristan and the Proletaire*

Suggestions have been made in the previous chapter that Flora Tristan used the class term of "proletariat" almost before it came into existence, inferring that political awareness preceded economic experience. Flora Tristan's observations of this class were conducted at a transitional stage in the French economy, and it is a matter of considerable controversy as to whether there was such a thing as a proletariat when Flora Tristan was touring France:

Le prolétariat a donc existé sous la Restauration, c'est à dire a manifesté son existence par des luttes sociales, par des tentatives de résistance économique (mutuelles, sociétés de secours). Il s'est engagé dans les luttes politiques qui opposaient les libéraux aux ultra royalistes. Et dans une occasion au moins, son intervention a fait reculer le pouvoir.(9)

The earlier view was that France experienced industrialisation at a later period than England, but this view has now been challenged. According to Judt, the industrialisation process was well under way in 1844. Contrary to popular myth, French industrial performance for the early to late nineteenth century was not at all poor or weak:

The gross national product measured per capita rose steadily from 1825 to the onset of depression in the mid-1870s ... By mid-century 30 per cent of the active population was engaged in industry or construction, and 55 per cent of the active population was wage-earning.(10)

It was particularly the urban and industrial milieu that Flora Tristan studied, and this was where the most rapid transformation had been taking place. But how representative of French industry was Lyon and the silk industry? According to the above source, the textile industry dominated the Lyon region until after World War One. In 1861 it was the biggest employer of women and the second biggest employer of men. Another feature of the textile industry was that old and new methods coexisted for a long time and, according to Judt, men were predominant in the skilled jobs whereas women were hired as unskilled workers:

Thus the 5,000 mechanical looms of 1830 rose to 31,000 by 1846 (in the country as a whole), while the Lyons Fabrique, an area of traditional and intensive textile output which even exported 78 per cent of its output by 1870, still had 100,000 handlooms in active use as late as 1880.(11)

Perhaps the most interesting of Judt's conclusions, however, concerns the role of women in the work place. While he states that the divisions between old and new, skilled and unskilled, workshop and factory, were not at all clear cut, he does admit that between men and women they were. Women were omnipresent in certain major industries, notably textiles and clothing; indeed, suggests Judt, women were much more susceptible to proletarianisation:

Differences in work experience between men and women were thus characteristic of life in French factories and workshops throughout the century - and it must be emphasised that these differences took shape *within* the experience of industrial employment, rather than between a male labour force and non-working women.(12)

The point which Judt makes here has considerable relevance for the direction of Flora Tristan's aspirations towards socialism, in which feminism becomes more and more explicit.

He declares that this proletarianisation does not in itself constitute an explanation of women's relative absence from the organised labour movement or their low membership of such traditional organisations as mutual-aid societies:

What we *can* safely infer, I believe, is that attempts to explain the aspirations and divisions of the labour movement in France through the conditions of work are made peculiarly troublesome by the extent to which some of the *male* labour force was marginal to precisely those developments on which rest certain influential theories of mass class consciousness.(13)

Judt is challenging the accepted notion that socialism developed from purely economic circumstances - that it was a mass labour movement based in industries which employed considerable numbers of unskilled labourers. The corollary would be that women would have been heavily involved. This was not the case. If it is accepted that socialism developed among the small numbers of skilled male workers, we have a possible explanation for the absence of women from early labour movements. But do we deduce from this that the particular experience of a small number of workers (skilled male workers) influenced the whole

direction of the labour movement and socialism? Did Flora Tristan contribute to this development? Is it for this reason then that women workers were scarcely visible in Flora Tristan's campaign? In other words, did Flora Tristan's experience lead her into the trap of campaigning for an exclusive group of workers who would dominate the labour movement in its form and aspirations? These are tantalising issues about the role and identity of the male and female labour force. Unfortunately, too little is known about female working conditions and aspirations of this period for the question to be seriously tackled. Judt himself side-steps the issue of women workers and their lack of involvement in socialist movements, and gives a rather open-ended answer to the question of the roles of the skilled *artisan and unskilled* worker in labour movements when he reiterates Marx's analysis that the development of socialism depended on non-economic issues, and that it was the political experience of revolutions (1789 and 1830) of the masses in France made them highly susceptible to anti-capitalist theories rather than their work environment.

It has been claimed that an important element of the originality of Flora Tristan's action is that she was the first person to talk directly to workers.<sup>(14)</sup> She herself saw her objective as such. Indeed her intention was to speak to as many workers as possible. However, gradually, the practical and physical impossibility of such an ambition caused her to modify her tactic somewhat. As we have seen earlier, she arrived in some places as a complete stranger. In such situations she had little choice; her method of making herself known when she had no workers' addresses, as was the case for Auxerre, Avallon, Dijon and

Chalon-sur-Saône, was to visit the organs of communication of the upper classes and officialdom:

Ici comme à Avallon je vois que là où les ouvriers ne sont pas réunis par le compagnonnage il serait impossible de rien faire. Il faudra bien faire sentir ce point. Le Tour de France T.1 p.81.

Flora Tristan found herself faced with the almost insurmountable task of making contact with a suspicious, even hostile, illiterate section of society. In contrast to her contact with already organised groups, there was despair in her comments about the workers as she realised the enormity of the task ahead. She analysed the reasons for their indifference.

Firstly there was the lack of time outside long working hours:

Ce qui empêche les ouvriers d'agir en vue de leur amélioration, c'est principalement le manque de temps. Le Tour de France T.1 p.86

Then there was their failure to comprehend, which she found exasperating:

Servir l'humanité est chez moi une passion dévorante. - Je donnerai ma vie, je vendrais mon âme pour pouvoir la servir ! Mais comment ? Elle est aveugle et sourde ! Le Tour de France T.1 p.78

She attributed their antagonistic behaviour to their poor standard of living, and to corroborate this view made enquiries about the wage levels:



Cette classe est des plus malheureuses. - Ils gagnent de 1 fr. 50 à 1 fr. 75, les plus habiles 2 fr. De plus ils sont assujétis à des chômages continuels, ce qui réduit leur jour à 1 fr. Qu'on juge de leur misère. - Voilà ce qui m'explique pourquoi ils étaient si malpropres. Le Tour de France T.1 p.89

The extent of exploitation and of alienation was much greater than Flora Tristan had envisaged before her tour. This had considerable consequence for her tactics. At an early stage of her campaign, Flora Tristan recognised that she had to scale down her ambitions of getting a workers' "Palais" established when she could not even get through to the workers the concept of the right to work:

Ainsi je renonce à leur faire comprendre cette première question, constituer la classe ouvrière. - Ils ne comprennent pas même ce que c'est que le « droit au travail ». Le Tour de France T.1 p.116

It is clear from her observations that Flora Tristan did not visit a homogeneous class.

Workers who had a secure job were not good material, thought Flora Tristan when she first arrived in Toulon. She was proved wrong. However, she was surprised that they had understood idea of class solidarity more easily than the concept of the right to work:

Chose étrange ils ont compris la plus haute question du petit livre : la constitution de la classe ouvrière - et ils n'ont pas compris le « droit au travail » - cela s'explique jusqu'à un certain point - étant déjà quasi organisés ils ont pu se faire une idée de cette constitution que je propose. - Et n'étant pas exposés au chômage ils ont moins compris la nécessité du droit au travail. Le Tour de France T.2 p.91

The small numbers constituting the élite activists of already motivated workers were class conscious, and by implication were the most receptive. They were ripe for conversion on the basis of the ideal of class solidarity. Flora Tristan had, however, mistakenly expected the very poorest, who were in the majority, to be the most willing to act for her, as they had nothing to lose.

Realising the extent of ignorance and the lack of class consciousness among the mass of the workers was a hard lesson for Flora Tristan. Hopes of quick results were dashed:

Il est clair qu'il faut au moins 7 ou 8 ans pour que toutes les idées de mon petit livre soient vulgarisées et aient pénétré dans le peuple, et moi, aveuglée par l'amour immense qui m'embrase, je veux qu'en six mois les ouvriers savent ce que moi j'ai mis 20 ans à comprendre ! Le Tour de France T.1 p.117

The hurdle was the familiar story of socialism advanced in theory coming from socialist intellectuals such as Flora Tristan, and the actual state of the proletariat, unable to mobilise. Yet according to Judt:

Socialist propaganda and the activists who carried it all over France in these years were catalysts for sentiments which already existed across a wide spectrum of opinion.(15)

If this was true, Flora Tristan was in fact discovering the drawbacks of trying to mobilise a class defined as such in economic terms but not yet economically class conscious. This gap which existed between socialism from intellectuals and the class most concerned but least involved, the nascent working class, was merely symptomatic of the

effect of the capitalist system; it was not the cause. The cause, as Flora Tristan and most socialists recognised, was property:

Quand on examine les causes du mal, on reste convaincu qu'il n'y a qu'une seule et unique cause, c'est la propriété. Le Tour de France T.1 p.93

Yet it was not all gloom and doom. Flora Tristan did draw some encouragement from her visits - in particular from her visit to Lyon. Lyon was the first successful contact, and also the high point of her tour. It was here that the most appalling conditions for workers existed and the most politically advanced workers were to be found; it was here that socialism in other forms had made inroads, and it was here that Flora Tristan elicited the most sympathetic response. This was not the only place where Flora Tristan found enthusiastic support, but thereafter she reserved special affection for the Lyon workers.

Compared with the despair of previous visits, she at last found workers ripe for conversion:

Il y a là en germe un ordre des choses nouveau ... Le Tour de France T.1 p.123

Why was Flora Tristan so encouraged by the workers in Lyon?  
Because they knew that they must rely on themselves:

... voici des hommes qui n'ont plus confiance aux hommes, ni députés ni savants ni prêtres ni rois, ils savent que tous ces hommes dits supérieurs sont des Robert-Macaire, des égoïstes sans entrailles, sans fraternité pour la classe ouvrière. - Ces travailleurs savent que tous les hommes riches sont leurs ennemis - et que les savants ne s'occupent pas d'eux ... Le Tour de France T.1 p.123

From Lyon onwards there was a greater amount of time spent with workers and less reliance on outsiders. There were larger, more frequent meetings and banquets. *Cercles* of *Union Ouvrière* were actually formed.

Aghulon considers that her visit to Toulon was much more influential, but that Lyon overshadowed the success of her visit there:

C'est en 1844 que commence ici la poussée des luttes qui marquera la fin du règne de Louis-Philippe.(16)

In terms of strike action because of her visit, Toulon was her biggest success story:

Dans ce milieu ouvrier toulonnais si divers, animé à la fois par une aspiration croissante au mieux-être et par la concurrence des différentes organisations - sans parler des échos qui pouvaient parvenir de la politique, - l'impulsion en est venue de l'extérieur, apporté par Flora Tristan.(17)

The visit to Toulon demonstrates to Aghulon that the months of preparations before the start of the tour had paid dividends:

Flora ne prit pas contact seulement avec les quelques ouvriers que leurs écrits avaient individuellement fait connaître, mais par Moreau avec toute une collectivité organisée, dont nous savons qu'elle était représentée à Toulon chez les travailleurs de fer.(18)

There is little doubt that Flora Tristan had some local impact on the labour movement. The strikes in the southern towns of Toulon and Marseille after her visit were attributed at the time by the authorities

to Flora Tristan, though they are nowadays interpreted equally as part of the opposition to the Orléanist regime.

Thus we see that although Flora Tristan's method for gaining contact with the workers was rather precarious at first, it did have some results. This is an indication that Flora Tristan skilfully manipulated the network of socialist-worker contacts then in existence. From some of her observations towards the end of her tour however, it can be seen that she began to view that network less favourably, such was her disappointment with the prospect of organising independent self-emancipatory worker groups. The term "*ouvrier intelligent*" entered her vocabulary; by this, Flora Tristan meant those who were capable of understanding her message and all that it implies. This category of worker was the most abused kind of person in France:

A faire un très beau passage sur la souffrance des  
ouvriers intelligents Le Tour de France T.2 p.229

In an extraordinarily revealing passage, she declared that the class conscious worker was abused by everyone, including his womenfolk:

Par qui l'ouvrier intelligent est-il crucifié ? Par ses frères de misères, par ses compagnons d'atelier, par le patron qui s'enrichit de ses sueurs; dans sa famille, par sa mère, par sa femme, par sa fille. Ses compagnons le raillent, l'insultent, le dénoncent, le poursuivent comme étant un être dangeureux - le patron le blesse dans sa liberté et dignité d'homme et le chasse - sa mère, sa femme, sa fille, l'accablent d'indignes reproches, le signalent comme un fou, un mauvais sujet, un émeutier, un révolutionnaire, un méchant ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.230

The paradoxical outcome of Flora Tristan's tour of France was the realisation that her socialist and feminist attempt to form a workers' union was opposed from within and without the working class, and that reliance on small groups of "*ouvriers intelligents*" would be the most effective way forward, opposed as they were by women. Having earlier condemned fellow socialists for working through élite groups, and for ignoring feminism, Flora Tristan seemed to arrive at a position indistinguishable from theirs.

**(e) Method of Campaign: Reformist or Revolutionary?**

In spite of frequent humiliations from police searches and confiscation of her possessions, Flora Tristan continued to campaign openly and to hound the local press for publicity and support for her cause. Only once do we find a comment to the effect that she should modify her behaviour for fear of making visits in future towns impossible:

J'avais envie d'aller voir le commandant pour lui demander la permission de faire signer les ouvriers employés à la Manufacture, mais il va me la refuser, peut-être écrira-t-il à Paris et, signalée encore de ce côté, serait s'exposer à de nouvelles persécutions dans les villes où je dois séjourner. - Evitons cela puisqu'en définitive je veux signaler principalement l'état de l'ouvrier. Le Tour de France T.1 p.218

However, as a result of persecution, the aims of her tour became confused. Which was now more important: to act as a militant outside the law or to act as an observer and thus remain within the law but

continue to campaign more indirectly for a change in the conditions she is recording? Her chosen course was the latter - reformism, not revolution. But even this milder course subjected her to considerable persecution. Here it is worth remembering what an unconventional if not daring thing this was for a single woman to do. On occasions she gave vent to her feelings of loneliness and discomfort, worsened by her almost constant illness throughout and the news that she was to be evicted from her Paris flat. Rather than succumb to despair, this intrepid campaigner carried on; after all, she was an experienced traveller, fully aware of the abuse to which such a course of action was liable to inflict on a woman. Ill-treatment by hotel owners, journalists and politicians only served to bear out her earlier analysis in Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères. In this rather obscure way, feminism was present. The irony of the situation was that once more, Flora Tristan found herself as an outsider, a pariah. From the outset, as early as her Bordeaux trip, the authorities viewed her with great suspicion. She had her strategy worked out, and her trip to Bordeaux in September served as a practice run. She outlined her plan of campaign which she hoped would forestall the action of spies or agents provocateurs:

Lors de mon Tour de France voici la marche que je suivrai : en arrivant dans une ville j'irai d'abord faire une visite au préfet - ou sous-préfet - au directeur de la police, à l'archevêque ou évêque, aux curés principaux, en un mot à toutes les autorités civiles, religieuses et même militaires. Le Tour de France T.1 p.64

Her main intention was to repudiate the title of rabble rouser or inciter of revolution:

Je leur dirai : Monsieur, je viens vous prévenir que je viens dans votre ville, non pas pour prêcher aux ouvriers la révolution, mais bien le contraire pour leur prêcher l'ordre or je viens vous prier de [ne] pas me confondre avec les émeutiers, les politiques révolutionnaires et autres marchands de palabres et harangues avec lesquels je n'ai rien de commun. Le Tour de France T.1 pp.64-65

Clearly, although she considered herself to be a revolutionary at the start of her writing career, this was not her aspired image as a campaigner for *Union Ouvrière*. On the contrary: from the outset of her tour of France, Flora Tristan disavowed any association with disruptive elements of society.

However, if she truly believed the authorities would be taken in by her explanations then her naivety was about to be destroyed. She was to be the subject of interest of the police in particular for the very charge that she repudiated.

But there was a more complicated reason for an open campaign. She believed that by distancing herself from other opposition groups, which were often compelled to go underground or which even espoused secrecy, that she would lead the workers to the right kind of political action:

Il faut qu'à tout prix je les sorte de cet ordre politique, idée creuse qui n'engendre que des émeutes, des arrestations, des persécutions pour les ouvriers; ce qui rend les hommes du pouvoir très contents et décourage les hommes de coeur et d'action. Le Tour de France T.1 p.63

It will be remembered that insurrections of a violent kind were very much a part of French politics at this time. There were fresh memories



of the 1830 revolution (in which the dispossessed assisted the bourgeoisie in the overthrow of the Bourbon Monarchy but gained little from it), of the Paris uprising of 1832 and the Lyon insurrections of 1832 and 1834. As the treatment Flora Tristan herself was to be given indicates, the establishment was fearful of the outbreak of other insurrections. Throughout the 1840s, opposition to the Orleanist Monarchy was growing in many sections of society; the authorities needed very little encouragement to severely repress collective demonstrations of discontent. As we have seen in earlier chapters, much as she admired the French for their capacity for revolution, at the start of her tour, Flora Tristan felt very strongly that the workers had nothing to gain from violent uprisings. She was careful to emphasise her choice of action as a legal and peaceful one:

... réclamez vos droits, au nom du droit ! Le Tour de France T.1 p.65

When there was a possibility of a rowdy meeting in Lyon, Flora Tristan refused to attend. Yet one can sense a great deal more bravado in Agen where she almost goaded the authorities to force her meeting to a close. One wonders if the constant harassment to which she was subject did not produce a feeling of greater determination on her part to carry on in passive resistance, fully aware of the implications. In Toulon she remarked that the presence of a single woman was enough to frighten those in charge, even though they had an arsenal at their disposal.

Flora Tristan had many other important reasons for avoiding secrecy: as she intended to seek out support for her cause from the enlightened members of the bourgeoisie and clergy, she had to be seen to remain within the law. Moreover, she could not possibly make herself known to the workers without the help of existing means of communication and organisations. Finally, she wanted the workers to take pride in their status of worker - to stand up and be counted.

She was confronting the dilemma facing all activists who want to bring about radical change while acting within legal limits. Was Flora Tristan then a reformist or was she a revolutionary? To judge by the above analysis one would be tempted to suggest that she wanted to be a respectable reformist. But perhaps the dichotomy posed is a false one. If we consider her view that purely political movements did not serve the workers' interests, we may find that the answer is that she was a reformist only because reformism was the only sure method of accomplishing a revolutionary change. In other words, to pursue revolutionary objectives by direct political action could only result in failure. This brings us to a consideration of Flora Tristan's relationships with the politicians.

#### **(f) Flora Tristan and the Politicians**

The constant awareness of the enormity of the task of motivating indifferent workers to act had an extraordinary effect on Flora Tristan. Rather than resign herself to defeat, she redoubled her efforts, becoming

embroiled in internal struggles over control of, and access to, workers. Some of these struggles had political overtones. One particular incident is described in great detail. On her return visit to Lyon, her friends reported that Rittiez, a republican journalist from Le Censeur, had spread the word among the workers that she was a secret government agent. His reason for doing so was political:

Il vient dire à Castel qu'il est furieux contre moi parce que je viens empêcher la révolution, qu'avec les prêches pacifiques je viens châtrer les ouvriers de Lyon et autres stupidités de ce genre ... Le Tour de France T.2 pp.7-8

Rather than leave the matter, Flora Tristan confronted him in order to obtain evidence for herself, so that she might use the incident as further evidence of bourgeois politicians' pettiness for her book. She dismissed the value of the dialogue with such activists. She believed that clearing her name with the workers would not further her cause; it was just wasting valuable time and energy on such a digression:

J'y vais non pas pour faire plaisir aux aveugles qui veulent que je me défende de cette absurde accusation, mais seulement pour donner à la calomnie de Rittiez une certaine consistance afin de pouvoir prouver sa bêtise, son aveuglement, dans le petit livre. Le Tour de France T.2 p.7

She had the same impression after her lengthy sessions with Lagrange in Chalon-sur-Saône:

Après nous avoir parlé pendant 4 heures de lui, de son épée et de ses sentiments pacifiques, et tout cela avec une chaleur, une véhémence et une passion qui oblige qu'on ferme les croisées afin que le bruit qu'il fait ne fasse pas attrouper les passants, Lagrange vous laisse assommé, assourdi et on ne peut plus mécontent de vous avoir ainsi fait perdre quatre heures. Le Tour de France T.1 p.100

Flora Tristan fell victim to the intrigues of the opposition groups under the Orleanist régime on more than one occasion. She condemned outright their factionalism:

... qu'il arrive demain une révolution et ces hommes s'entretueront comme ils ont fait en 93 ... Le Tour de France T.2 p.14

She had no confidence whatsoever in their ability to bring about real change in circumstances for the workers:

Oh ! je le dis à qui veut l'entendre, s'il nous fallait faire une révolution par et pour de semblables hommes, je préférerais rester jusqu'à la fin des siècles avec le Pape et Louis Philippe ! Mais quel gouvernement de pareils hommes pourraient-ils donc établir ? Rien que d'y penser on en frémit ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.15

There was no talk of collaboration or *fraternité* when it came to this class of "*canailles*". Nowhere is Flora Tristan's intransigence more evident than in her confrontation with Rittiez. However much she would have liked, she could not prevent the workers from considering the politicians as their potential allies. Accompanying her was a certain Castel who quietly but firmly pointed out the disadvantages of making enemies of the republicans. He claimed he needed all the soldiers he could get for the revolution, but Flora Tristan replied that once they had gained power, the republicans would not retire gracefully, but would stay in power to protect their interests. She saw the quarrels between royalists, Bonapartists and republicans as an irrelevancy and a distraction to the interests of the workers:

Oh ! ouvriers, il vaudrait mieux garder Louis-Philippe et M. Guizot pendant 300 ans que de tomber entre les griffes de ces misérables sous-bourgeois ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.167

Her attacks on the professional politicians from other parties were all the more virulent because of the way they used the workers for their own ends:

Lorsque ces misérables chevaliers reconnaissent dans un ouvrier une grande et belle nature, ils s'empressent de corrompre cet ouvrier afin de s'en faire un instrument évitant qu'il devienne pour eux un obstacle. Le Tour de France T.2 p.167

She was particularly acrimonious in her attacks on the democrats; they were more harmful to socialism than was official governmental condemnation, and it was part of her mission to teach the workers not to trust them:

... il est probable que cela entre dans ma mission de démolir lesdits Démocrates ... Le Tour de France T.2 p.19

This is the reverse process of the republicans' attacks on communists seen earlier in the chapter. Whereas republicans attacked socialists and communists for refusing to participate in the opposition to the monarchy and campaign in favour of establishing a republic, the socialists and communists were exasperated by the republicans' refusal to campaign for social reforms.

According to Kessel, it was only after the 1830 revolution that the opposition groups began to think of recruiting from among the working

class. The liberal bourgeoisie was ill informed and scarcely politicised; the proletariat was completely cut off from the past revolutionary period. A republican movement as such did not exist, but individual republicans began to see the significance of a mass movement for their cause:

D'une manière plus concrète et plus immédiate, les républicains de 1830 vont comprendre l'importance du fait ouvrier, et soit par idéalisme, soit dans l'intérêt de leur cause, tenter de s'appuyer sur le prolétariat.(19)

Some republican socialists such as Blanqui did exist, but they did not constitute a large group. At the same time of course, the workers, in their disillusionment with the failure of the 1830 revolution to alter their circumstances, had little interest in politics as they had no interest to defend in the July Monarchy and were turning to questions related to work. The distinction between political and social became quite important. In the early days of the 1848 revolution, the interests of both republicans and socialists did run parallel, but not for long. Henceforth, socialists themselves were to be divided for a long time over whether the political questions of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* concerned the workers. It was discussed by Lenin in 1920:

Tant que les classes ne sont pas abolies, parler de liberté et d'égalité en général, c'est se leurrer ou leurrer les ouvriers ainsi que tous les travailleurs et les exploités du capital; c'est en tout cas défendre les intérêts de la bourgeoisie. Tant que les classes ne sont pas abolies toute réflexion sur la liberté et l'égalité doit susciter la question: liberté pour quelle classe? à quelle fin? égalité entre quelles classes? sous quel rapport précis?(20)

The dilemma remains today: for some socialists and for some feminists, to talk purely in democratic terms is to fall into the bourgeois trap. This issue will be discussed in the final conclusion.

Flora Tristan's increasing involvement in the politics of France in 1844 is rather paradoxical: while she was quite happy to use the terms of the French revolution, she could see no interest in the form or nature of government. Yet her energies were being consumed by the very people she considered least important - politicians.

Her reaction to the antagonism from liberals and democrats who were preoccupied with political reforms did not assist her cause but merely added to the suspicions and hostility she was to encounter from the local *notables* and clergy. There were few occasions when she was given a good press:

Le journal conservateur, *La Gazette*, a parlé de mon livre et de mon voyage, et pour la première fois voilà un journal bigot qui parle de moi et de mes écrits en termes convenables.- Je pense que le rédacteur avait la fièvre, c'est probablement une erreur qu'on va rectifier dans le prochain numéro. *Le Tour de France* T.1 p.85

Press reports, visits from the police, confiscation of papers, and orders from the *Procureur du Roi*, were damaging publicity for the cause of *Union Ouvrière*. This adverse publicity attracted the curious to her meetings and ruined her method, which was to talk to small intimate groups. Flora Tristan was much happier with groups of around forty. In this way she could distinguish receptive listeners from those who failed to comprehend:

Or j'ai fait l'expérience à Bordeaux que si l'on veut se faire comprendre et entrer en relation intime avec ses auditeurs, il faut être dans une chambre d'une moyenne grandeur et ne pas avoir autour de soi au plus 40 hommes. Le Tour de France T.1 p.101

There is a world of difference between Flora Tristan's public career and that of another activist, Louise Michel, forty years later. This was not yet the era of huge public meetings and rousing speeches, since such activities were of course banned. Even so, Flora Tristan's method was carefully chosen. She preferred small groups for pedagogical reasons; she wanted her ideas to have a longer lasting impact than short lived enthusiasm or even spontaneous uprising:

Je vis là combien il serait facile de provoquer l'enthousiasme du peuple, lui faire faire du bruit, de l'agitation. Oh ! ce serait bien plus vite que de s'en faire comprendre. - Mais je méprise ce genre de succès, j'aspire à une place plus noble. Le Tour de France T.2 p.30

Given the antagonism between Flora Tristan and opposition groups, there was little common ground with, and therefore limits to the distractions from, her most important audience, the workers. She herself recognised that among the workers themselves there was little interest in the factionalism among the politicians:

Je suis revenue à Lyon avec joie, et aujourd'hui il me tarde de le quitter. J'éprouve réellement trop de fatigue, puis je commence à m'irriter. - D'ailleurs je sens que j'ai fait tout ce que je pouvais faire pour le moment, eux-mêmes sont fatigués. Le Tour de France T.2 p.19



(g) Flora Tristan and the Bourgeoisie

Part of Flora Tristan's strategy was to make contact with the ruling class. If ever there is a paradox in her attitude to the question of class conflict, it is evident here. On the one hand she was expecting help from certain quarters, including enlightened members of the bourgeoisie, and was disappointed when it failed to materialise:

Du reste ce qui m'arrive ici est caractéristique, pas un seul bourgeois n'est venu me voir - pas un seul républicain - pas un seul fouriériste - pas un seul cabétist - pas un seul carliste - pas une seule femme. Le Tour de France T.1 p.165

On the other hand she was horrified when the bourgeois attended the meetings in large groups:

J'arrive et je vois effectivement environ 200 hommes - qui m'est le plus antipathique. Le Tour de France T.1 p.101

On one particular occasion, she was more afraid of the consequences of addressing the two classes together, and decided not to speak at all, declaring that she could not possibly say the same thing to the *maîtres* and the *ouvriers*:

Comme je n'attache pas la moindre importance, mais pas la moindre à l'opinion publique, je ne peux jamais me laisser dominer par une position aussi périlleuse qu'elle soit. Le Tour de France T.1 p.101

In portraying the antagonism of the bourgeoisie, she showed in an indirect way that class collaboration was impossible:

J'avais besoin de voir ce qui se passe à Lyon pour me faire une idée juste de la force de l'ennemi - le premier ennemi celui qui mène la société, l'énerve, la tue : c'est la boutique prêtre-église - le second la bourgeoisie - le gouvernement, c'est-à-dire le roi et l'administration ne sont que les esclaves des prêtres et des bourgeois. Le Tour de France T.1 p.127

Her original reliance on the bourgeoisie as a potential source of help for the implementation of her plan gave way to pessimism as the extent of proletarian oppression gradually strengthened her opinion that the gulf between the workers and their masters was ever widening.

As the project of trying to establish an umbrella organisation of support for the "Palais" crumbled, the study of power in society achieved new significance for Flora Tristan. It was a study that filled her with increasing gloom. Visits to the homes of the bourgeoisie heightened her sense of oppression. It became almost unbearable for Flora Tristan to experience any sense of well-being and physical comfort there:

Ce luxe pour les uns aux dépens du nécessaire dont les masses sont privées est d'une immoralité monstrueuse. Le Tour de France T.1 p.204

She compared the misery of the workplace with the luxury of the owner's home and had a strong sensation of alienation; she could hear the walls screaming at her, crying out in the name of the oppressed whose poverty had created the wealth:

M. Cherpin ... vint m'accompagner, me fit voir toute sa fabrique qui est mal tenue. - En revanche il s'est fait bâtir pour lui une très jolie maison, on peut dire à coup sûr que chaque pierre est un membre du corps de ses frères, cimentée avec le sang et la sueur de ses frères

esclaves travaillant dans ses caves-bagnes, dites ateliers. Le Tour de France T.1 pp.206-207

One can detect a move to a more adamant position on property towards the end of her tour. The reflections on the gold watch incident(21) caused her to reiterate Proudhon's famous remark that property is theft:(22)

Je comprends maintenant qu'on ne saurait trop répéter que la propriété c'est le vol. - Il faut répéter cette grande vérité sur tous les tons, dans tous les lieux - et que toute propriété est vol - propriété de sol, de capital, de femmes, d'hommes, d'enfants, de familles - d'idées, en un mot toute propriété. Le Tour de France T.2 p.206

Visits inside factories and workshops became equally depressing as they demonstrated how the employer class refused to acknowledge the value of manual work by exploiting to a maximum degree the workers, expecting the workers to be content with minimum wages and to live in abject misery. One employer's remarks filled her with rage:

Il nous parla de l'ouvrier avec le plus grand dédain, nous disant qu'ils seraient heureux s'ils le voulaient, qu'ils gagnaient de fortes journées de 2 à 2,50 mais qu'ils buvaient tout. Le Tour de France T.1 p.205

She condemned the inhumanity of the bourgeoisie as a class, and she also condemned the economic system which maintained them in power:

... moi qui attaque franchement, hardiment et terriblement la société des bourgeois, parce que ces bourgeois sont propriétaires du sol, des capitaux et de la vie de leurs frères. Le Tour de France T.2 pp.205-206

Once again we find a comparison with the condition of slavery; a factory owner had such a powerful hold on his workers that they might as well have been slaves. She became increasingly aware of the class hatred which existed:

Ce droit accordé à un seul homme, droit en réalité de vie et de mort sur 400, 1 200 familles - est un droit tellement inique, tellement monstrueux ! qu'il fait naître de l'ouvrier ainsi à la merci du salaire, contre le chef, le propriétaire de capitaux, une haine comme jamais l'esclave le plus fier, le plus sensible, le plus énergique n'a pu en concevoir contre son maître! Le Tour de France T.2 p.100

Flora Tristan did not often elaborate on an alternative system of ownership; this was not the intention of her book. However, on one occasion when she was tempted to keep a gold watch she had found in an hotel room, she declared:

Il faut que la devise de la première révolution soit:  
« Plus de propriétés d'aucune espèce » ... Le Tour de France T.2 p.206

She tried to distinguish between hatred of the property system and hatred of property owners, whether they be feudal or capitalist. It was the system she detested. One of her last entries was a suggestion that the State should be the property holder for the nation:

Le droit au travail attaque la propriété ; c'est la seule manière de l'attaquer légalement et justement. - Car qu'y a-t-il de plus légal et de plus juste que le travail ! - Par le droit au travail l'Etat devient propriétaire de l'état n'est-ce pas là constituer la propriété de manière à la mettre à l'abri pour jamais de toute attaque. (A développer cette idée.) Le Tour de France T.2 p.233

These notes are too sketchy for us to be able to surmise the role she envisaged for the State in developing a socialist ownership of property.

Her comments on competition indicate that Flora Tristan was aware that the employer was as much a prisoner of the system as a master:

Je trouvais dans ce fabricant des sentiments plus humains que dans les autres. - Ses fileurs faute d'eau pour faire tourner les machines chôment une grande partie de l'année (quelquefois 4 mois), puis très souvent la moitié du jour. - Je lui parlai de cela et il m'en parut peiné. Il sent aussi que tout le mal est dans la concurrence. Le Tour de France T.1 p.207

What exactly did she expect members of the bourgeois class to do? Bourgeois women should devote themselves to the workers instead of to the Church, as she stated in Union Ouvrière. Employers should let their workers form unions or *cercles*. More importantly, they should declare themselves in favour, in principle, of her idea. They should condemn the present system.

Flora Tristan was astonished when the bourgeoisie refused to contribute to the "Palais" fund when they learned they were not to be admitted. She obviously expected the classes to remain separate. Puech would have her as a mild mannered reformist because she did not demand the abolition of the bourgeoisie. She came fairly close to a more radical position, however, towards the end of the tour. If there was to be no change in the system she warned that the workers would want to avenge their miseries:

... j'ai compris l'horreur, la haine, la colère que le peuple a pour eux. Le Tour de France T.2 p.207

For the bourgeoisie, she predicted dire consequences:

Je puis prédire une chose, c'est que le jour où la révolte des salariés éclatera contre les chefs d'usine il se commettra des vengeances comme jamais encore on n'en a vues. Les maîtres seront rôtis vifs et mangés par les ouvriers. Le Tour de France T.2 p.100

Contact with the bourgeoisie included contact with the press. By the time she got to Dijon, Flora Tristan hardly needed to introduce herself. She had attracted the attention of the bourgeois press:

Le journal conservateur, la *Gazette*, a parlé de mon livre et de mon voyage, et pour la première fois voilà un journal bigot qui parle de moi et de mes écrits en termes convenables. Le Tour de France T.1 p.85

The result was that although Flora Tristan was at great pains to meet and inform journalists of her intentions, she was given very bad publicity. According to Leveque, however, interest in Flora Tristan was rather limited, there being a good deal more attention at the time devoted to the question of the routing of the Paris - Lyon railway line:

En présence d'une actualité aussi diverse et, à leurs yeux, aussi contraignante, les journalistes ont jugé tout à fait secondaires le séjour dans leur ville d'une femme venue parler aux ouvriers, et la parution d'un petit livre - un de plus - sur la transformation de l'ordre social. Et cela quelle qu'ait été leur tendance politique.(23)

Leveque suggests that a more sympathetic attitude from journalists in the first three or four towns Flora Tristan visited, not yet

industrialised to any great extent, had been crucial to her campaign, since she had very fragile links with the working class, dispersed as they were in many small firms.

#### Ch) Flora Tristan and the Clergy

Flora Tristan attached considerable importance to the power of the clergy. This was because she saw the Church as a proponent of submission and resignation:

Les Jésuites ici se sont emparés de l'éducation, de la direction des enfants du peuple, de la jeunesse, tous passent par leurs mains. - Voilà ce qui nous explique la résignation de ces ouvriers en soie qui travaillent 16, 18 et 20 heures par jour pour gagner 2 fr. et 1 fr. 50 ! C'est que depuis l'âge de trois ans, tous ont été élevés par les Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes et on les a façonnés à la résignation, à la souffrance, à la misère, à l'abaissement devant le maître. Le Tour de France T.1 p.128

The power of the Church was clearly a hindrance to the spread of her radical ideas:

Tant qu'il y aura des prêtres et qu'ils auront quelque pouvoir sur le peuple, il est impossible de songer à l'affranchissement des prolétaires. Le Tour de France T.1 p.128

In effect, the outcome of the Church's preaching during Flora Tristan's lifetime was to be the cause of the dechristianisation of the working class in France over the next century. Why did she insist on seeing the clergy when she knew what the answer would be? We are given

the impression that Flora Tristan relished a good oral battle. She had the liveliest of exchanges with her outright opponents, particularly bishops.

The antagonism of this class to the idea of a workers' union was very strong. Did Flora Tristan really think she could find a sympathetic bishop? By recording her visits and the exchange of views with the clergy, it would seem that the visits were of merely symbolic importance. This does not mean that Flora Tristan was an unbeliever. On the contrary, she felt the need for a more meaningful religion, and wanted to see the abolition of the power of the established Church which preached submission to the workers instead of their God-given rights. Her determination to show the hypocrisy of all religions and not just Catholicism, caused her to seek out protestant pastors.

#### **(1) Conclusion**

Although Flora Tristan's manuscript of her diaries was only published in book form in 1973 for the first time, most of its content has been available since 1925 through Puech, who had access to it and quoted prolifically from it for his biography. Apart from some passing references in regional newspapers to Flora Tristan's visit, the diaries are the main source of information concerning her contact with the French labour movement, as many of the biographies of her which rely heavily on her account of her mission will testify.(24)



Often, however, the diaries are overlooked. For instance, in his history of socialism, Dolléans devotes seven lines to the tour after three pages on Union Ouvrière. (25)

The diaries are an invaluable first-hand account of the effects of industrialization during this period as they provide insights into the dreadful conditions in which the working class lived in the early 1840s: their types of jobs, low wages, relations with employers, poor housing conditions, inadequate daily diet and clothing; all paint a picture of abject misery and severe repression. The fact that Flora Tristan was one of the first to meet the workers on their own territory (at a time when illiteracy was the norm among workers who could scarcely express their grievances and when there were no official survey figures available) lends to her studies a rare authenticity. This is a point developed by Rigaud-Weiss:

Après Buret et Villermé et avant la première enquête officielle de 1848, il y a surtout quatre écrivains réformistes et socialistes en France qui ont utilisé les premières enquêtes ... tout en complétant ces données par leurs propres recherches: Blanqui aîné, Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux et Flora Tristan. Leur intention fut semblable à celle de Villermé et Buret: ils voulurent rendre public l'état social et moral des ouvriers de leur temps et en déduire leurs revendications sociales. (26)

As the first pages of the diary reveal, Flora Tristan believed she had found the way forward, and believed it was simply a question of informing the workers of this for there to be an immediate response:

On me fait attendre, moi qui ai annoncé apporter le salut de la classe ouvrière. Le Tour de France T.1 P.28

Inevitably she was at once frustrated and anguished at the workers' failure to comprehend. Undeterred, she was fully aware of the enormity of the task ahead:

Oh! je comprends aujourd'hui pourquoi la classe ouvrière n'a point de défenseurs, d'hommes qui lui soient dévoués.  
- C'est réellement la stupidité des ouvriers qui est capable de rebuter, de refroidir, de dégoûter l'âme la plus ardente. Le Tour de France T.1 p.34

The source of inspiration that kept her going was of course Flora Tristan's belief in her redemptive mission. She therefore set out inspired with a sense of mission which was strong enough to stave off any feeling of futility of the exercise. Towards the end of her tour especially, the search for disciples transcended her constant discomfort and persecutions, giving a new meaning to her sense of mission. She began to talk of martyrdom. But in the end, Flora Tristan transformed her journey from an impossible mission to one of observation.

The value of the diaries therefore becomes less that of a chronicle of the *progress of a revolutionary than a pertinent analysis of the power structure within society, the all-powerful ruling class, the bourgeoisie, the new owners of wealth, the holders of public office, and the powerless working class.*

In the beginning, she was hoping to be able to set up workers' groups in every town she visited and to be able to start collecting funds for putting her project into operation in the very immediate future. As her journey progressed, Flora Tristan found herself

explaining the most basic of principles to workers who were for the most part illiterate. Throughout her journey, it is remarkable how little the ideas of Union Ouvrière were discussed at all. Flora Tristan presented Union Ouvrière as it stands.

The lessons learnt by Flora Tristan on this tour of France were not so much as a result of the feminist-socialist theme proclaimed loudly in Union Ouvrière, but were as a consequence of her relationship with the authorities and a result of the actual state of the working class itself. Consequently, the circumstances of her tour did have an impact on her theory.

The importance of the diaries does not stem from Flora Tristan's meagre results. The transmission of her socialist message of Union Ouvrière was undoubtedly a failure. No "Palais" were built, though some workers' *cercles* were formed in towns in the south of France. Were the diaries to have been judged exclusively on the criterion of her own success, they would have been of no interest at all, but as an account of the character of the labour movement in France in 1844 - as a contribution to social history - the diaries assume considerable significance. Nevertheless, Flora Tristan's ideas and actions did have some contemporary influence. It is worth noting that publication figures for Union Ouvrière would indicate that circulation was wider than for Proudhon's Qu'est-ce que la propriété? or Marx and Engels' The Communist Manifesto. (27)

At the very least, we can see that she contributed to a general trend whereby there was an encounter of intellectual socialism and working class experience:

En un tiers de siècle, les grandes idées du socialisme ont été exposées, avec une audace de pensée exceptionnelle et avec une puissante conviction.(28)

## (2) THE IMPACT OF FEMINISM ON THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

So far, I have discussed the extent of Flora Tristan's socialism during and as a result of her *Le Tour de France*. I have shown that her primary concern was how to change the class structure. On the state of the French labour movement within the context of society as a whole, I have shown that she found exploitation was greater than she imagined, class domination more powerful, alienation more severe. But although she had an incisive perception of alienation and exploitation under capitalism, she produced little or no analysis of the ownership of the means of production under capitalism, nor did she present a programme for control by the producers of the means of production.

The effect of her feminism on the labour movement in France during her tour must now be assessed. In doing so, we must ask the basic question of whether her sympathies were determined more by socialist criteria than by feminist ones. Was she constantly aware of the Woman question or did it assume for her only intermittent significance?

There are four types of references to "the Woman question" in the diaries: first, misogynist reactions: second, preaching the principle of feminism to the assembled workers and their reaction: third, women workers, and fourth, the superiority of women.

#### (a) Misogynist Reactions

Flora Tristan provided evidence of misogyny amongst journalists. According to one journalist, for example, women did not have access to public places, therefore they were inferior. The public place in question was the café. By this, Flora Tristan deduced that the secret of success was to spend hours playing billiards in a bar:

Monsieur de Champvans me disait un jour : - « Ce qui fait notre supériorité sur vous femmes, c'est que nous autres hommes nous vivons continuellement sur la place publique. » - D'après cela, il faudrait conclure que la destinée de la race supérieure est sur cette terre de passer 10 heures à jouer aux cartes, aux dominos et au billard ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.188

She also came across opposition to women's political involvement from republicans:

... M. Rittiez commença d'abord par déblatérer contre mon système, puis enfin lâcha le grand mot : Il ne convient pas qu'une femme se mêle de politique, la France ne peut marcher sur les ordres d'un cotillon. Le Tour de France T.1 p.182

However, there is no mention of any misogyny in the socialist groups. Flora Tristan's perception was that gender did not impede the progress of her socialist preaching in workers' circles:

Non seulement mon titre de femme ne les éloigne pas, comme cela arriverait si je m'adressais aux bourgeois, mais il les attire. Le Tour de France T.2 p.91

Reception of her feminist ideas, however, was a little more hostile than she had imagined.

#### (b) The Feminist Message to Male Workers

On reading the diaries, it is clear that Flora Tristan became seriously hampered in her attempt to put the theory of Union Ouvrière into action. She became so engrossed in the process of communicating with the workers that she almost lost sight of her message. Only during the banquets in Lyon, Marseille and elsewhere did she have the possibility of preaching her message of feminism to male workers:

Je parlai la première et je dis en quelques mots des choses très bonnes sur ce qu'on peut espérer des femmes, de leur amour, dévouement, intelligence, activité, si on veut les appeler dans le mouvement social. Le Tour de France T.2 p.31

In Lyon she did succeed in holding meetings with women workers, but these were rare occurrences, and they did not make any impact on her overall strategy. Her tendency to rely heavily on existing groups where there were few women members caused her to neglect the task of

converting women to feminism. Workers were the priority; seeking out workers left very little room for feminist meetings as such.

How true is it to suggest that workers rejected her feminism? We know that she did appeal to them on feminist grounds during her tour as she did in Union Ouvrière, identifying two forms of female oppression: at work and in the family. When she mentioned the unequal wage rates in some jobs, she appealed to the male workers' sense of self-interest to resist this practice of the employers. The employment of women at half rates was a threat to the male workers' conditions in the same way that the *carmagnoles* undermined the *Compagnon* rates. If they let the employers employ women at half rates then that was also opening the door to using child labour.

On female oppression within the family, Flora Tristan had comparatively little to say. As I have suggested earlier, Flora Tristan seldom had access to workers' homes. There is only one remark in the diaries on family size in relation to poverty:

Ce pauvre garçon aussi ne fait rien, il n'a pas de fortune et a une nombreuse famille. Je ne comprends pas que dans cette position on fasse des enfants tous les ans, cela me paraît le plus épouvantable de tous les crimes. Le Tour de France T.1 p.203

The only occasion the chapter on women was mentioned on her tour was in Paris. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the early reactions to her criticism of family behaviour were fierce, so Flora Tristan tended to avoid the issue thereafter.

In his analysis of French ideology in 1848, Devance indicates there are conflicting positions in socialism on the question of women and the family. The puritanical streak, the most notorious proponent being Proudhon, disapproved of women working outside the home:

Le consensus des classes laborieuses est encore plus large s'agissant seulement des normes relatives à la femme, la famille et la sexualité. A de rares exceptions près, la parole ouvrière masculine est antiféministe; plus massivement encore, elle repousse les « doctrines immorales » venues de Fourier et d'Enfantin. Le discours de la subversion morale est essentiellement bourgeois et élitaire.(29)

The libertarian streak represented by Fourierists and Saint-Simonians, as we saw earlier, did not make great headway in workers' circles. As a result, between 1828 and 1848 there was considerable dilution of feminist enthusiasm. By 1848, socialists were virtually silent on the issue of revolutionary sexual morality. The most radical position was a conventional view of the family as a necessary social group with women in the home, but which granted the right to divorce. Where the feminist position was changed in these twenty years was in a realm untouched by Flora Tristan: more vociferous demands for political and civil rights and the right for women to participate in and organise associations of workers. Possibly contemporary women such as Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroin were to learn from Flora Tristan's disillusioning experience.

There are doubts about Flora Tristan's own commitment to feminism from the fact that she herself adhered to this conventional view of the family, as we saw in the previous chapter. From all appearances,



therefore, there was nothing inherently radical in her demands for a new role for women. She simply wished they had equal rights as workers: a place outside the home. However, appearances may be deceptive, since in 1844, that form of sexual equality in itself was an extremely radical thing to demand. It is true that Flora Tristan, unlike the feminists who took part in the 1848 revolution, was far from being interested in political rights. We know that she considered the exercise of political power to be useless for male workers, and it was the same for women. But in that economic rights for women were what primarily interested her, she is still a radical feminist by contemporary standards.

Nevertheless, her radical suggestion was advanced in a somewhat timid way, leaving the impression that she felt on safer ground when she was discussing a much vaguer kind of feminism as "*la femme messie*" during the banquet in Lyon.

In the end, therefore, it seems her sympathies were determined more by socialist criteria than by feminist ones. She made no systematic mention of the groups' attitudes to women. Nor did she refrain from contacting groups where there were no women to be seen. Feminism was not her overriding concern - it did not impede the progress of her socialist preaching. In some cases it was almost invisible.

My suggestion is that because she operated through the medium of already formed labour and socialist groups, she lost sight of her feminist goal. In a similar manner, those who act within such

organisations as the *C.F.D.T.* or the *Parti Socialiste* can often lose sight of feminism.

### (c) Women Workers

It has been suggested earlier that Flora Tristan seriously underestimated the readiness of the workers to assume control over their own destiny. Even more remote from reality was her expectation that a positive response to feminist socialism would come from male workers. As we have seen in the previous chapter on *Union Ouvrière*, the reason why Flora Tristan sought support from male workers was that she did not consider women to be a force in themselves, capable of acting independently. Today the argument used by socialists and communist based parties and trade unions in France, and indeed elsewhere, for refusing to have separate women's sections, is that women are not an economic force in themselves. This raises the question of what constitutes an economic force, but unfortunately there is insufficient relevant information in *Le Tour de France* to assess how Flora Tristan saw this question.

Nevertheless, during her tour, Flora Tristan was very much aware of the plight of women of the working class. As workers, they were subject to unequal treatment:

Dans chaque atelier où j'entre on se plaint des salaires : la journée des femmes est de 15, 20, 25 sous, celle des hommes 1 fr. 50, 2 fr., 2 fr. 50, et des chômages considérables. *Le Tour de France* T.1 pp.145-146

As wives of workers there was often no work for them:

Les femmes ici ne font rien que leur ménage. - A part quelques petits états ou elles gagnent peu. Le Tour de France T.2 p.90

Or they were employed to perform menial tasks in appalling conditions such as the washerwomen in Nîmes:

... 300 à 400 laveuses au moins sont donc condamnées à Nîmes à passer leur vie le corps dans l'eau jusqu'à la ceinture, et dans une eau qui est un poison puisqu'elle est chargée de savon, de potasse, de soude, d'eau de javel, de graisse et enfin de toutes sortes de teintures comme indigo, garance, safran, etc., etc. Le Tour de France T.2 p.126

This passage on the washerwomen is considered the most moving passage of all Flora Tristan's writing. Certainly it is one of the most appalling cases of exploitation she came across. She wondered why no philanthropist or journalist had come to their defence. She decided she would write an article condemning the barbaric treatment of the women who had to stand all day, waist-deep in the poisoned water:

Il faut que mon article sur ce lavoir soit foudroyant ! qu'il ameute la presse et tous les cœurs généreux ! contre cette ville maudite qui ose condamner de braves travailleuses à une mort lente et terrible ! Le Tour de France T.2 p.127

Often Flora Tristan found cases of women as petty criminals, forced to supplement their income by thieving or prostitution. In all of these instances she considered that women proved their superiority and

resilience by surviving against the enormous odds stacked against them by a punitive economic and legal system:

... les femmes du peuple ont plus de travail matériel et plus de peines morales que les hommes. - Mais voilà c'est qu'elles sont plus fortes moralement. Le Tour de France  
T.1 p.122

We have seen that women did play a predominant role in the industrialisation of France from the very start. But, like many existing groups, Flora Tristan did not attract vast numbers of women to her meetings. Her experience therefore is like that of her male socialist counterparts who failed or refused to mobilise women workers.

Feminists like Flora Tristan have been criticised for retarding the development of socialism. For example, Struminger's thesis is that the gender division of the working class was endorsed by the feminists (of whom numbered Flora Tristan) in the work place:

Though the *canutes* in Lyon were the first silk workers to leave the family workshops to seek employment in larger workshops and factories, they were encouraged by their husbands, by feminists, by the schools and the church, to see themselves as only temporary workers, whose primary function was to be wives and mothers.(30)

More precisely, Struminger also criticises Flora Tristan for naïvely thinking that equal pay for women was consistent with an unchanged capitalist economic system:

She did not address herself to the problem of the correlation between production costs, prices and demand or, more precisely, to the question of whether an increase in workers' compensation would not lead ultimately, to

higher prices for the finished product and cause unemployment through a shrinkage in demand.(31)

But perhaps this was Flora Tristan's point - that the demand for equal wages for women would force through a change in the economic system towards socialism. Criticism of Flora Tristan's work in market terminology such as this one does not do justice to the radical position of the right of women to work as a principle when, as Struminger illustrates clearly enough herself, practically everyone else was ignoring the issue of unequal wages. Also, the whole point of Flora Tristan's revolutionary socialist position on the "*droit au travail*" was that male and female unemployment would be abolished. Flora Tristan did not concur with those contemporary commentators who opposed or regretted the use of women in the labour force. She firmly believed that women had a right to work and the right to receive equal wages. The ambiguity in her ideas surrounding the question of women and work is not, as Struminger suggests, because she was simply another who saw women's place in the home, but because the economic consequences of the organisation of equal female labour were not fully developed in her mind. It was to take another generation of socialists to complete this task.

#### (d) Superiority of Women

Flora Tristan was convinced of the superiority of women. She mentioned this in *Pérégrinations d'une Paria*, in *Néphis* and in

Promenades dans Londres. Comments in Le Tour de France demonstrate that she had found further evidence of this superiority.

J'ai rencontré ici une femme du peuple réellement intelligente ... c'est une intelligence supérieure et malgré cela étouffée par le mari et la misère. Le Tour de France T.1 p.84

The admiration that Flora Tristan had for the superior ability of women to endure suffering did not, however, lead her to a more radical policy than the call for sexual equality. It was not the major thrust of her feminism. What is significant for her feminism is that the notion of "*la femme guide*", a term she had abandoned after writing Néphis, returned to assume a new significance for Flora Tristan as her mission seemed more and more impossible.

There are two aspects to this: the return of the Saint-Simonian notion that Woman could be the redemption of humanity through a revaluation of female qualities:

Je leur démontrai que nous étions arrivés au règne des femmes - que le règne de la guerre, de la force brutale, avait été celui des femmes [should be *hommes*] et que maintenant les femmes pouvaient faire plus que les hommes parce qu'elles avaient plus d'amour, et qu'aujourd'hui l'amour seul devait gouverner. Le Tour de France T.2 p.31

and the question of herself as "*la femme guide*" who became the "*défenseur du peuple*". These two images merged in Flora Tristan's scheme.

(e) Return of "*La Femme Guide*"

While remembering that Flora Tristan had intended to edit her notes - for notes they were, written in a great deal of haste, often in the evening after a long and busy day - and remembering that she was in fact quite ill during the latter half of her tour, the strange style of reference to "*la femme guide*" and almost religious fervour of her sense of mission becomes comprehensible. As she outlined in *Union Ouvrière*, she was looking for a person to lead the movement. However, as the tour progressed, she despaired of finding anyone suitably devoted to the cause apart from herself:

Oh! si de nos jours le peuple se constitue et qu'il m'appelle à le conduire ... *Le Tour de France* T.2 p.83

Her personal assumption of the role of "*femme guide*" came after a year of battling on her own to talk to workers; it came when the Saint-Simonians had popularised the idea so much that she believed workers were ready to listen to a woman. This is how Flora Tristan's feminism expresses itself:

Ce que je fais en ce moment, les résultats que j'obtiens parlent plus en faveur de la supériorité de la femme que tout ce qu'on pourrait écrire et dire sur la question. *Le Tour de France* T.1 p.123

I would suggest that this was how Flora Tristan resolved the contradictions between her radicalism of principles and her experience:

Ces travailleurs savent que tous les hommes riches sont leurs ennemis - et que les savants ne s'occupent pas d'eux - alors ces hommes guidés par leur bon sens se sont dit :

voilà une femme qui vient à nous pour nous servir, c'est Dieux qui l'envoie, allons l'écouter et tous viennent n'importe de quel parti qu'ils soient. - Me voilà sans l'avoir prémédité la Femme-Guide, telle que moi aussi dans mon bon sens je l'avais rêvée. Le Tour de France T.1 p.123

This position is the legacy Flora Tristan left to the radicals of the future: how to accomplish a synthesis of socialism and feminism into action.

I am not inferring that Flora Tristan was voting herself the "woman messiah" for whom the Saint-Simonians spent years searching. This is an outdated literal interpretation which is no longer valid: a more accurate allegorical figure is John the Baptist. Flora Tristan took on the role of leadership merely because no one else had yet emerged to do so. Another misleading argument is to dismiss her talk of "*la femme guide*" as simply what was written when she was under a great deal of stress. Some critics find it easy to misinterpret her words because they are written in note form in her diaries. Hence what for some is eccentricity, for others is fanaticism.

Her delirium cannot detract from the validity of the relationship she had established between feminism and socialism, though it may have been the reason why she has been neglected, or not taken seriously, by later socialists.

#### (f) Conclusion



In assessing Flora Tristan's feminism, there are two judgements to be considered. Firstly, the project to establish the *Union Ouvrière* was unsuccessful. Secondly, Flora Tristan failed to implement a feminist campaign alongside a socialist one. The second question is the one which I feel has not yet been thoroughly examined. On her failure to establish the *Union Ouvrière*, Dijkstra writes:

The factors which prevented her from completing her mission were many. Her premature death on her Tour of France at forty-one, of exhaustion and typhoid fever, was of course the fatal one, but as we have seen, the complex social, historic and economic pressures against which her plan had to work and the intricate psychological needs which determined the formulation and elaboration of her plan, ensured its failure at least in her lifetime.(32)

Considerable attention is devoted by Dijkstra to the psychological reasons for this failure, but her thesis overemphasises the question of failure in terms of personality. Certainly, the eccentricity of Flora Tristan's behaviour contributed to her isolation during her tour, but the gap between socialist intellectuals and workers, which she tried to bridge, equally accounts for her isolation. Moreover, her failure to establish the *Union Ouvrière* was due in greater part to the adamant gender and class structure of France in the 1840s - a factor completely beyond Flora Tristan's control.

Turning to the second judgement, that Flora Tristan failed to implement a feminist campaign alongside the socialist one: it is true that her feminist enthusiasm faded as the tour proceeded: the more she related her discoveries to the class question, the less she specifically incorporated feminism into her project.

But it is worth noting that feminism made much greater impact within socialist intellectual circles than within labour based organisations in Flora Tristan's day. However, Flora Tristan may be best judged, not on her success or failure in advancing in practice the cause of either socialism or feminism, but on firstly the clarity with which she analysed contemporary social life, and secondly the acuteness with which she attempted a synthesis between socialist and feminist aspirations. The lessons that can be drawn from this attempted synthesis will form the subject of the next chapter.

## Footnotes to Chapter Six

- 1 Interview with Stéphane Michaud, Newcastle upon Tyne, September 1986
- 2 Dominique Desanti, Flora Tristan: La Femme Révoltée (Revised edition) (Paris: Hachette, 1980) p.268
- 3 Maurice Aghulon, Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique, p.132
- 4 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left: Studies in labour and politics in France, 1830-1891 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.63-64. Although not an original writer on this period, Judt is one of the most pertinent on this subject as his study is a close scrutiny of the reception of socialist ideas by workers. For an analysis of the rate of industrialization of France in the nineteenth century see François Crouzet, De la supériorité de l'Angleterre sur la France: l'économie et l'imaginaire (Paris: Perrin, 1985) 596p
- 5 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.64
- 6 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.76
- 7 Maximilien Buffenoir, 'Le Communisme à Lyon de 1834 à 1848' in Revue d'histoire de Lyon, septembre-octobre 1909, pp.347-361 (p.355)
- 8 Maximilien Buffenoir, 'Le Communisme à Lyon de 1834 à 1848', p.356
- 9 Patrick Kessel, Le Proletariat Français avant Marx Tome 1: '1789-1864' (Paris: Plon, 1968) p.209
- 10 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.31
- 11 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.32
- 12 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, pp.50-51
- 13 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.51
- 14 See G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol.1, pp.183-188
- 15 Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left, p.76
- 16 Maurice Aghulon, Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique, p.154

- 17 Maurice Aghulon, Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique, p.154
- 18 Maurice Aghulon, Une ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique, p.154
- 19 Patrick Kessel, Le Prolétariat Français avant Marx, Tome 1, p.235
- 20 Cited by Patrick Kessel, Le Prolétariat Français avant Marx, Tome 1, p.327
- 21 See page 290
- 22 See Jean Bancol, Proudhon: oeuvres choisies: textes présentés par Jean Bancol (Paris: Gallimard, 1967) p.73
- 23 Pierre Leveque, 'Mission Impossible? Flora Tristan en Bourgogne vue par la presse locale' in Un Fabuleux Destin: Flora Tristan, pp.65-81 (p.74) (listed under 'ACTES')
- 24 I refer to the biographies by Puech, Baelen, Gattey, in particular.
- 25 Edouard Dolléans, Histoire du mouvement ouvrier, Tome 1: '1830-1870' (Paris: A. Colin, 1953) pp.191-195
- 26 H. Rigaud-Weiss, Les Enquêtes ouvrières en France entre 1830 et 1848, p.114
- 27 According to Armogathe, the first editions of Union Ouvrière ran to 4000 copies, whereas Proudhon's Qu'est-ce que la propriété in 1841 only ran to 500, and only 2000 of Marx and Engels' The Communist Manifesto were printed in 1848. See Armogathe and Grandjonc's introduction to their edition of Union Ouvrière, p.18
- 28 Michel Béaud, Le Socialisme à l'épreuve de l'histoire (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982) p.37
- 29 Louis Devance, 'Femme, famille, travail et morale sexuelle dans l'idéologie de 1848' in Mythes et Représentations de la Femme au XIXe siècle: numéro spécial de Romantisme (Paris: Champion, 1976) pp.79-103 (p.96)
- 30 Laura Struminger, Women and the Making of the Working Class: Lyon 1830-1870 (Vermont, Eden Press, 1979) p.16
- 31 Laura Struminger, 'The Legacy of Flora Tristan' in International Journal of Women's Studies, vol.7, no.3, 1985, pp.232-247 (p.238)
- 32 Sandra Dijkstra, Flora Tristan and the Aesthetics of Social Change, p.299

## Chapter Seven

### FLORA TRISTAN: SYNTHESIS OF A FEMINIST SOCIALIST

The relationship between feminism and socialism is both diverse and complex. In Flora Tristan's life and work, the full extent of this diversity and complexity is exemplified.

In this thesis it is indicated that feminism was central to utopian socialist thinkers, but not to workers' movements. For as long as Flora Tristan was influenced by the former, feminism was also a crucial element of her work. Once she moved towards involvement with workers' movements, she did not automatically continue to develop her feminism. The previous chapter indicates that while Flora Tristan made a serious contribution to the spread of socialist ideas in workers' groups during and after her tour of France, feminism as she had expressed it in earlier times became of secondary importance in her life and work because of her decision to proselytize the idea of *Union Ouvrière* to the working class.

This did not mean that she had transferred her allegiance from one group to another. Far from it: feminism receded into the background very quickly because it was not an integral part of any collective

movement, given the socio-economic and political circumstances of France in 1844. Although feminism had made some headway in socialist intellectual circles: although there is evidence to show that women were a part of the labour force from the very earliest period of industrialisation in France, the fact remains that when Flora Tristan spelt out her feminist message to workers she visited, they were not receptive.

Yet Flora Tristan's feminism should not be judged as Marxist historians have judged the contribution of utopian socialist intellectuals to the spread of socialist ideas among workers - as a failure, because it lacked a grasp of concrete reality. Flora Tristan's feminism was in her very action. She immersed herself entirely in the reality of social life. She witnessed workers' conditions as a woman. Her feminist specificity at this stage was that she believed, like Marx, that all the oppressed had something in common. Her failure in practice was not due to her ignorance of the real world, but because of the intransigence of the already established forms of gender behaviour in contemporary France.

The proper way to judge Flora Tristan, therefore, is not by her practical success or failure in advancing the cause of either feminism or socialism, but in the insight she displayed in attempting to effect a synthesis between these two very different ideologies.

It is tempting to ask whether, after her tour, she would have turned to other forms of activism in an effort to give feminism a higher

profile - but this is pure speculation. My concern is not with what she would have done after her tour of France, but with showing that the subsequent development of feminism raised the very issue encountered by Flora Tristan. It is not sufficient to agree in principle with feminist demands; it is not even adequate to have an analysis of the oppression of women, as most socialists have. There must be a means of expressing gender oppression. The problem confronting Flora Tristan is the same for feminists in the socialist movement today: how to integrate feminism with socialism.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the fact that the issues raised by Flora Tristan reappeared in the subsequent development of feminism and socialism. My final assessment of the relationship between feminism and socialism examines the following points: the affinity between feminism and utopian socialism did not extend to labour movements or to scientific socialism: feminism and socialism are mutually indispensable: there are nonetheless severe tensions between feminism and socialism: these tensions can only be resolved by an unavoidable choice of priority between feminism and socialism.

#### **(1) FLORA TRISTAN: WITNESS TO THE AFFINITY BETWEEN FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM**

The affinity between feminism and utopian socialism which Flora Tristan encountered did not endure sufficiently to extend to labour movements or to scientific socialism as they developed. Throughout the

history of the labour movement, there are many examples to illustrate trade union opposition to women because of the sexual division of labour; this opposition developed in France alongside a working class morality where male workers wanted their women confined to a domestic role in order to preserve so-called "family life":

Chaque jour on voit tomber un petit métier et s'élever une fabrique; et chaque fabrique appelle à elle un nombreux personnel féminin, parce que les femmes coûtant moins cher que les hommes, il est naturel qu'on les préfère partout où elles suffisent. Or, il tombe sous le sens, que si la mère de famille est absente de sa maison quatorze heures par jour, il n'y a plus de famille.(1)

The stronger this morality, the greater the resistance to feminist demands. However, it was primarily because of the different wage rates allocated to women that this opposition to working women was expressed and with increasing vigour as the century advanced. The gender division of labour meant increasing antagonism of trade unions to female labour.(2) However, as I have illustrated, this exclusion cannot easily be explained - even in Flora Tristan's time this was the case. What was much rarer was any condemnation by her contemporaries of the very harsh employment conditions for women. I have demonstrated that this inferior role of women in the labour force was highlighted by Flora Tristan. Her understanding of the exploitation of women in the work force means that she was able to identify an affinity between feminism and socialism beyond egalitarianism, beyond the romantic vision of messianic feminism. In her socialism, her feminism is retained, in the only way possible. Flora Tristan could not predict that women in the labour force would be marginalised even further as the century wore on. The lesser of two



evils for women was, and still is, badly paid work rather than no work at all.

As I make clear in Chapter One, when socialism did start to organise once again at the end of the Second Empire in France, the affinity the utopian socialists had expressed with feminism in the France of the 1830s and 1840s was no longer there. Henceforth, scientific or Marxist socialism was to be economic in concept, organised around the male labour force, with little room for discussing the social, cultural or even personal implications of what socialism entailed. The question of women's oppression was raised and discussed only as part of the capitalist system of property. Marxist socialists decided that sexual oppression would automatically disappear with the abolition of property. Consequently, they did not consider it was worth discussing issues around the private sphere, whereas Flora Tristan had tackled the issues of the role of women as educators in the family, the importance of education as a gender equaliser, and the question of exclusion of women from political activism.

The development of scientific or Marxist socialism and the organisation of labour movements in this way was a highly significant point as far as the relationship between feminism and socialism is concerned. The result was that the relationship was not only prevented from growing, it was severely distorted.

There are two important consequences to be discussed here to account for the downgrading of feminism in socialist ideology after

1848. Firstly, since the synthesis of feminism and socialism which Flora Tristan had worked out depended on the willingness of male workers to assume the cause of women, the project failed. The same pattern can be seen in the attitude of the C.G.T. prior to the 1970s:

... la réticence de la C.G.T. à prendre en compte les problèmes appartenant, traditionnellement à la sphère du « privé », touchant à la famille et aux relations dans le couple. La C.G.T. estimait que des progrès dans ces domaines seraient automatiquement induits par le biais du changement politique ou social ou encore accomplis du fait de la bonne volonté des travailleurs.(3)

Secondly, as a consequence of this rejection, feminism either remained within the literary genre or returned to egalitarian demands and as a result was to be seen by Marxists as a bourgeois ideology. As we have seen earlier, in chapters Two and Three, these two paths had been explored by Flora Tristan, and as such were rejected: she had become all too aware of their limitations in her attempt to forge a movement of solidarity among all oppressed groups. We have seen that Flora Tristan's cherished hope that bourgeois women would answer their special calling to come to the services of the workers' union faded:

Mais ce qui me désole c'est que partout je cherche des ouvriers, des bourgeois, des femmes capables de continuer ma mission, moi une fois partie. - J'en trouve nulle part.  
Le Tour de France T.1 p170

She had no success when she tried to convince them of her plan outlined in Union Ouvrière:

Je suis allée voir quatre grandes dames de la ville - pour les prier de se faire femmes de charité. - Mais nous

le sommes, me dirent-elles. - Non mesdames, vous n'êtes que femmes d'aumônes. Le Tour de France T.1 p.84

The tenuous link Flora Tristan tried to forge between bourgeois women and workers by practical means, other than through the ballot box, did not outlast her. She had nonetheless tried to avoid what she saw as the pitfalls of political reformism. After her death, egalitarianism in the sense of the demand by feminists for equal legal and political rights thus became a more vital premise for feminism than for socialism. The following generation of socialists did not consider that the struggle of the proletariat should be based purely on political terms. For, as Engels was to demonstrate, universal suffrage, as long as capitalism existed, merely served that class's interests.

... the possessing class rules directly through the medium of universal suffrage. As long as the oppressed class, in our case, therefore, the proletariat, is not yet ripe to emancipate itself, it will in its majority regard the existing order of society as the only one possible and, politically will form the tail of the capitalist class, its extreme Left-wing. To the extent, however, that this class matures for its own self emancipation, it constitutes itself as its own political party and elects its own representatives, and not those of the capitalists. Thus, universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state; but that is sufficient. On the day the thermometer of universal suffrage registers boiling point among the workers, both they and the capitalist state will know what to do.(4)

For this very reason, Flora Tristan had not pursued the egalitarian path; it was too restricting, as it did not relate to working class women's experience of oppression, nor did it attack the root cause of oppression. In forming a new socialist ideology, she had realised that

political egalitarianism was already outmoded as a radical ideology. Yet it is clear that Flora Tristan's originality lies in her evolution through these different approaches; her lifetime's experience is virtually a microcosm of what was to come. Socialism as it developed throughout the nineteenth century paid less and less heed to this principle in purely political terms as justification for change. Socialists had transferred their analysis to the economic base; they had begun to talk of the inevitable transformation of the ownership of the means of production through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

When bourgeois feminists began to organise collectively towards the end of the nineteenth century, egalitarianism was an important part of their ideology. This meant the development of a rift: between a bourgeois or egalitarian feminist movement, still campaigning for participation in the parliamentary system of democracy, and the working class movement for socialism, campaigning specifically for higher wages, or more generally for participation in the ownership of the means of production. After the granting of universal male suffrage in France, the drift away from politics among trade unionists after the failure of the revolutionary movements of 1830 and 1848 could only damage working class women. Henceforth, the question of whether to demand emancipation through existing political channels or whether to disdain the trappings of male bourgeois power was to be the cause of frequent divisions within the two ideologies. Flora Tristan, as we have seen, was aware of the limitation of campaigning for change through such channels, a limitation still very much in evidence in the *Parti Socialiste*. Despite an increase of the female vote for Mitterrand, despite the permitted existence of

tendencies or groups within the *Parti Socialiste*, the attempt by women to have their *Courant G* officially recognised was quashed by the leadership.(5) Feminists within the *Parti Socialiste* had the choice of accepting this decision or leaving the organisation:

Constatant après deux ans de vains efforts, l'impossibilité de se faire entendre et réunir en Assemblée Générale le 26 novembre 1983, le courant a pris acte de la décision du Parti et voté sa dissolution. Continuer de faire semblant d'exister en tant que courant, reviendrait pour nous à cautionner l'inacceptable. Si le féminisme autonome (et peut-il être autrement) est impossible dans le P.S., nous voulons que cela soit clair: notre existence artificielle ne ferait qu'entretenir une mystification. C'est parce que socialistes, et en tant que socialistes, que nous avons pris cette décision en réponse à l'arbitraire qui nous a été imposé.(6)

In their search for affinity with socialists, modern feminists have turned recently to the history of the socialist era before the development of scientific socialism, because they have been trying to get beyond the Marxist analysis of women's oppression, which sees it as a part of capitalist exploitation. While recognising the exploitative system of capitalism, feminists have come to realise that neither the labour movement nor the socialist political parties are prepared spontaneously to embrace their cause. It is for this reason that Flora Tristan's life and work have assumed a new significance. Her experience was by no means a watershed for feminism and socialism; rather, this affinity was to be one which would recede and return in different historical circumstances.

The complex issues involved in feminist and socialist theories of exploitation serve to highlight the fact that feminism is more

compatible with utopian socialism than with Marxist or scientific socialism. Feminists today claim that the Marxist explanation unwittingly accepts the capitalist division of labour: that women play a peripheral role in capitalist relations of production and are similar non-entities in socialism. Had the scientific socialist analysis included non-economic forms of oppression, this would perhaps not have happened, but one of the difficulties in the way of such an analysis is the fact that class consciousness seems an inherently male phenomenon:

The class consciousness of the industrial worker of the male sex has been the yardstick by which the consciousness of women workers and the consciousness of male workers' wives have been measured and, generally found wanting. Women workers, judged by these standards, have been shown to be passive docile workers, difficult to organise, reluctant to assume trade-union responsibility and profoundly depoliticised.(7)

Gibbon demonstrates that class consciousness has been defined with reference to men's experiences of waged labour rather than to that of women or of both sexes. Feminists challenge socialists on the importance of the economic base in their analysis:

La combativité ouvrière féminine existe ... si leur combativité passe souvent inaperçue c'est parce qu'elle se manifeste sur d'autres terrains que ceux auxquels tant les sociologues que les syndicalistes sont habitués à référer la revendication ouvrière, c'est à dire ceux des hommes.(8)

Therefore, when women acted as a collective body in the 1970s, they forced trade unions and parties of the Left to get beyond the economic base:

Trade unions were led to take principled decisions and formulate policy on such questions as contraception and abortion by feminists acting inside and outside the labour movement. Hitherto, such issues were beyond what the unions considered their legitimate realm of concern.(9)

Feminists have therefore been suspicious of trade unions. The interpretation that trade unions began as a movement to defend craft workers, the élite of the workers, and that today trade unions are seen to represent the interests of a privileged fraction of the working class, namely the white, male skilled worker, clearly questions their likely allegiance to feminism. But feminists ought to be aware of overlooking the value of trade unions, a mobilising force which could serve the feminist cause. This is the very thing that Flora Tristan recognised.

When have the workers, however, formed one vast powerful international union as Flora Tristan envisaged? Granted, it has been the chief aspiration of the socialist movement since her death, but it remains an aspiration. Workers are still constantly on the defensive today, tactically divided by their capitalist employers, and frequently divided culturally, nationally and ideologically. This, as true Marxist socialists would admit, has been a result of the capitalist structure itself. Firstly, as can be seen from Flora Tristan's picture, employers saw to it that trade unions were prohibited, then only tolerated within a very limited field of activity - the work place. Secondly, the government curbed political expression, and so political movements such as the 1848 revolution very quickly lost their socialist content. The Paris Commune of 1871 was very severely repressed. As a result in

France, in order to avoid repression, the labour movement tended to stay out of politics, just as Flora Tristan had recommended they should. Those socialist leaders who, unlike Flora Tristan, believed the labour movement should be political, did so because they saw political institutions as the real centre of the power structure. But, to this day, there has been a division among socialists on the matter of political reformism or the notion of economic class warfare. In both cases, however, women have been marginalised. Flora Tristan attempted to break this mould of a male dominated socialist movement by inserting her demand for a "1789 for women" in Union Ouvrière.

In spite of criticisms of its inadequacies, therefore, feminist socialists, who participate in the trade union movement, claim that to deny the power and achievements of the labour movement is to be left with no springboard at all for the launching of feminist ideas. After experimenting with the limited forms of feminist action available - petitions and literary works - Flora Tristan chose to launch a campaign for women's emancipation through the socialist movement, at the cost of having her feminism less specifically expressed.

## **(2) FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM: MUTUALLY INDISPENSABLE**

Feminism and socialism are mutually indispensable. There has been renewed interest in Flora Tristan because, until recently, the full impact of the discoveries she made in developing her synthesis of feminism and socialism were not realised by more than one or two



individuals such as Madeleine Pelletier.(10) How to insert feminism permanently into socialism is the central question. Clearly there is divergence over the very sequence of sex and class oppression: whether patriarchy is independent of capitalism or is an integral feature of it: whether or not socialism is inherently capable of assuming the demands of feminists. These depend on whether or not a satisfactory sequence can be worked out tactically. The fact that Flora Tristan as a militant attempted to put her ideas into practice makes her case all the more interesting, and raises these very issues.

The modern dilemma of feminists who want to be socialists lies in the question of priorities. Feminists who believe women's oppression to be the most deeply rooted and oldest form of oppression consider that women must be liberated before any lasting establishment of socialism can be achieved. They have learnt from the past one hundred and forty years of socialist struggle that the class conflict is not the only conflict in society: that the gender conflict is at least as deep. Yet feminism alone cannot achieve women's liberation. Alone, it fails to tackle the question of basic power in society.

Flora Tristan did not confine herself to feminist demands, but was interested in the whole fabric of society, in the very question of women and power in the broadest sense. The immediate short term demands of feminists were so limited, and had such little impact, that it is hardly surprising to find her working for a socialist plan of action; the study of power led her to seek an alternative to the structures of capitalist

society. The link between feminism and socialism is in this very question of power.

As Flora Tristan was to discover, to campaign for limited feminist demands could not radically, irreversibly, alter the power structure. Again this is a contentious issue today. For instance, in attempting to form an analysis of the domestic mode of production, many argue that the oppression of women is not crucial to the continuation of the capitalist system.<sup>(11)</sup> For socialists to argue that it is not is to exclude women from the struggle to end oppression. For feminists to argue that it is not is to believe that improvement in the conditions of women can be achieved without affecting the structures of capitalism. By demanding equal pay for women and men workers, Flora Tristan was refusing to confine herself to demands for the male labour force, and, at the same time was refusing to limit herself to demands for women only.

It is all very well to say that feminism and socialism are mutually indispensable, but from a radical feminist point of view, it could be argued that Flora Tristan chose to work towards a socialist solution, thereby compromising her feminism to such an extent that it virtually disappeared. Of course Flora Tristan saw socialism as the best way of implementing feminism. She wanted a redemption of the working class through the emancipation of working class women. But would this grant women full equality? Would women find independence outside the family? Would they find their liberation as full equals in the economic sense whilst the traditional family structure was maintained as Flora Tristan expected it to be?

While the experience of the past fifteen years or so demonstrates the weaknesses of the modern radical feminist position, namely isolation and aloofness, it has also shown that women have only succeeded in developing their consciousness when they had no male interference. We have seen that Flora Tristan herself tried to have "women only" meetings, and saw the necessity of appealing to bourgeois women on their own terms. A "women only" strategy of action achieved a symbolic and tactical importance in France and elsewhere in the 1970s, unprecedented in the history of feminism. The élite groups may well justify their deliberate isolation by claiming, as they have done so adamantly in France, that they cannot find their true identity unless they make a complete break with patriarchal institutions, including socialist ones.

Nevertheless, feminism, like socialism, is constructed from experiences of living. Cut off from the common experience of the vast majority of women, it cannot survive for long other than as an élite group of intellectuals, like *Psych. et Po.* for instance.(12) Ideology cannot develop in a vacuum without becoming hollow and ineffectual: feminism cannot be a totally all inclusive philosophy; neither can it be self contained. It is a universal experience, often developing in parallel or tangentially to other radical movements. In Flora Tristan's day this was the case. Certainly it has been remarked by Pope that feminists seem to be able to develop during fruitful periods of development of other liberation movements.(13)

The study of the past is important for feminism if it is to make any worthwhile contribution to understanding the nature of the conflict

between the sexes, and by extension, the nature of the relationship between feminism and socialism. In particular, the study of the past relationship between feminism and socialism is of special importance for the modern debate. In the past the conflict between the sexes as an issue in socialist debates was ignored just as, all too often, women themselves were generally neglected in the socialist movement. But Flora Tristan demanded of the working class that they recognise women as equals in the work force. Indeed she demanded of the working class that the emancipation of women should be their primary concern. She stated categorically that there could be no socialism without women's emancipation:

- Mais, prolétaires, il vous reste à vous, hommes de 1843, une oeuvre non moins grande à accomplir. - A votre tour, *affranchissez les dernières esclaves* qui restent encore dans la société française, proclamez les DROITS DE LA FEMME ... Union Ouvrière p.70

Although her feminist perspective was limited, by modern standards, she has been proved right in her understanding of the inadequacies of a socialist movement without a feminist perspective. Women are still demanding recognition of their demands and of their identity, not only within the capitalist system but also from the socialists. There has been no full emancipation of women in either capitalist or socialist societies.

### (3) TENSIONS BETWEEN FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM

Radical feminists want a new order of society where relations between men and women are on an equal different footing, in much the same way that socialists want an end to a class-ridden society. Essentially, this means a change in the traditional family structure and a change in the organisation of labour, only the latter of which Flora Tristan herself proposed. These changes advocated by feminist socialists are claimed to be beneficial to both sexes, not just to women, an important point made by Flora Tristan to assuage the anxieties of men taking up the cause of women's emancipation: educate women and the whole family benefits, including the husband, father and son. Feminist socialists also argue that any liberation of women through the transformation of society will imply the liberation of men. Indeed, their essential reason for adhering to the socialist movement, whether through the trade union movement or within a political party, is the same as Flora Tristan's: there can be no emancipation of women without socialism.

To study the history of the growth of these demands without taking into account the mechanism of the sex-class war can only lead to a rather narrow version of women's history. The question of women and the power structure of the public sphere, which includes the socialist movement, must be examined if women are to escape from their restricted role in the private sphere. Until recently, a history of "women" consisted solely of an account of women within the bourgeoisie. This perpetuated the myth that the labour movement and the feminist movement

have always been at loggerheads. The revised versions of the history of the early feminist demands show that these demands were not issued solely by bourgeois feminists, anxious to enjoy a privileged role within the system, but that many working class women did enlist the help of the socialist movement to campaign for better treatment. At times also, bourgeois women militants assisted the trade union movement. Furthermore, the revised "women's" history of the labour and socialist movement indicate that the profile of women activists is much higher than previously supposed.(14)

It cannot be denied that there *are severe tensions* between feminism and socialism, although it is not my stipulation that all feminism, past and present, was consistently dismissed out of hand by the Left. Flora Tristan was a model woman for members of the Left once they saw the danger of their militant female faithful walking out to form their own groups, as they very often did in the 1970s. Women did so because as soon as they began to agitate, feminists were regarded in France with great suspicion by the extreme Left and by the established parliamentary Left. Not only were feminists seen as divisive, and therefore a threat, but they very quickly found that their socialist male comrades were so antagonistic that the feminist movement soon became bitterly divided as to whether socialism should be seen as the enemy or as a potential ally.

The shift of feminist positions and the splits among feminists have been numerous over the past fifteen years. They are frequently caused by disputes over the question of tactics, the putting into practice of the theory, of how to act to further the cause of women. Many feminists

would argue that there is somehow a natural affinity with socialism in theory but that the difficulties occur when putting their shared ideas into practice. As recent years have shown in France, other feminists find their principles compromised or neglected if they are in a political organisation such as the *P.C.F.*, *P.S.*, *P.S.U.*, or a trade union such as the *C.G.T.* or *C.F.D.T.*; the only option is to dilute their ideals or leave. At the other end of the spectrum, the feminists who consider the entire political establishment to be part and parcel of the man's world that they reject find themselves in a vacuum. The most extreme case is *Psych et Po*, an intellectual Parisian group, so remote from the experiences and life styles of the mass of French women that it is accused of being anti-women. The experience in France shows that feminism and socialism may be as incompatible as they are compatible.

#### **(4) PRIORITY OF TACTICS BETWEEN FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM**

Flora Tristan's feminism included an unusual blend of sexual egalitarianism and inegalitarianism. The first principle developed in her early works is that of the social, political and economic equality of men and women. But she also insisted that the difference of sexual identity should be recognised. On this latter question of complementary natures modern feminists do not always agree. Flora Tristan's position itself fluctuated somewhat, and it is uncertain whether she endorsed women's emancipation from the family and their ability to have a separate economic identity from the male wage earner. Moreover, failure on Flora Tristan's part to recognise the potential in women for

collectively organising themselves casts further doubt on her credentials as far as some modern feminists are concerned. We must remember however that feminism has developed considerably as an ideology since Flora Tristan's day. The very institution which she left intact - the family structure - has been thoroughly debated since.

However, despite the fact that feminism has developed as an ideology, the fact remains, as I mentioned earlier, that two of the most glaring and enduring aspects of sexual inequality - the sexual division of labour and separate spheres - are still with us. The class system is as rigid as ever. Neither the feminist movement nor the socialist movement have succeeded in their aims. For this reason, I would suggest that while recognising the source of the potential conflict between the two ideologies, feminism and socialism can be beneficial to one another, often, however, only by an unavoidable choice of priority between feminist and socialist interests.

Once into the sphere of socialist ideas, feminism often seems to be relegated to a secondary position. Socialism is the whole, the set; feminism becomes the part, the subset. What is interesting for the present feminist and socialist developments is that Flora Tristan's work reveals the conflict between the two by default, as much as explicitly. It was only towards the very end of her short life that she began to have experience of antagonism from other women of her own milieu and from the working class. We may speculate whether these antagonisms were not more obvious to her because they were not yet explicit in the new capitalist order or because they were so firmly entrenched as to be



impenetrable. The neglect of women by the socialist movement is as much the result of the sexual division of labour in capitalism as any sex-class war. This was possibly what convinced Flora Tristan of the importance of trying to insert feminism into socialism. The success of this effort, still being attempted, will depend on the ability of the socialist movement to radicalise itself. Over one hundred and forty years ago, Flora Tristan focussed attention on this critical point - that the prerequisite of feminism was radical socialism.

## Footnotes to Chapter Seven

- 1 Jules Simon, L'Ouvrière 1861 (Facsimile reprint: Brionne: Gérard Montfort, 1977) p.7
- 2 In her case study of textile workers in Lille at the end of the nineteenth century, Patricia Hilden clearly illustrates the extent of the gender conflict within the labour movement. See her Working Women and Socialist Politics in France (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) pp.123-169
- 3 Jane Jenson, 'Le « problème » des femmes' in M. Kesselman and G. Groux, editors, Le Mouvement Ouvrier Français 1968-1982 (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1984) p.208
- 4 Friederich Engels, 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' in MARX and ENGELS, Selected Works (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968) p.579
- 5 Courant G: the name adopted by a group formed by socialist women within the Parti Socialiste. The French Socialist Party has, from its inception resisted separatist women's groups. For an account of the burgeoning movement, see Charles Sowerwine, Les Femmes et le Socialisme (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1978)
- 6 Editorial in Mignonnes allons voir sous la rose, no.13 (février 1984) (dernier numéro), p.1
- 7 Margaret Gibbon, Gender and Class Consciousness: A case Study, Unpublished PhD thesis, Reading University, 1986, p.3
- 8 Danièle Kergoat, Les Ouvrières, cited in Margaret Gibbon, Gender and Class Consciousness p.3
- 9 Margaret Gibbon, Gender and Class Consciousness, p.4
- 10 In 1906, Madeleine Pelletier was the first woman to speak at a national assembly of the newly unified socialist party the S.F.I.O. By 1910, she had become an executive committee member, and in this capacity waged an unsuccessful campaign to get the S.F.I.O. to present a bill in the Chambre des Députés for women's suffrage
- 11 See Mike Donaldson, 'Marx, Women and Bourgeois Right: Feminism and Class Reconsidered', Australia and New Zealand Journal of Sociology vol.14, June 1978, pp.131-138
- 12 Psych et Po, meaning Psychanalyse et Politique
- 13 See Deborah Pope, The Development of Feminist Consciousness in Women's Writing in France, pp.360-368
- 14 See Patricia Hilden, Working Women and Socialist Politics in France

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined the intellectual development of Flora Tristan. My conclusion reiterates what previous commentators have stated but amplifies previous work on her reputation as a feminist socialist: I suggest that her effort at achieving a synthesis of feminism and socialism has been undervalued.

I began with the statement that the most persistent image of Flora Tristan has been through her identification with the feminist and socialist movements. In Chapter Seven I have tried to show why this is so by indicating the different ways feminism and socialism have evolved, and how the same issues have re-emerged in radical thought since Flora Tristan's death.

In Chapter One I demonstrated how Flora Tristan's image has fared since her death and suggested that although she is known to have found a synthesis, her work has not been examined thoroughly enough to illustrate just how she did so. This is what I have done.

My concluding remark is that Flora Tristan's contribution lies not just in her endeavour to find a synthesis of feminism and socialism; in doing so she shows just how difficult it is to achieve such a fusion.

Each stage in Flora Tristan's intellectual itinerary is marked by an impasse which caused her to change direction.

In Chapter Two, an examination of Flora Tristan's early works shows that she was not content to remain within the confines of egalitarian feminism. After discovering the collective nature of oppression she began to explore existing modes of thought, encountering the predominant one, namely egalitarianism. This philosophy did not satisfy her attempt to locate the precise nature of oppression, nor did it offer a satisfactory method of action, since women were banned from the public sphere of politics. She proceeded to look for ways of expressing the complementary nature of the sexes in order to explain the predetermined differences between the sexes, expected and created by society.

This led her to use the novel and the Saint-Simonian idea of Woman as the moral salvation of humanity, examined in Chapter Three. Again the inadequacy of this genre and message caused Flora Tristan to move on in her search for a way of implementing her ideals of feminism and socialism.

Chapter Four examines the next step in her development, the progression to a factual survey of the workings of an advanced industrial nation. Here the theory of oppression becomes more sophisticated; there is a synthesis of feminism and socialism by finding a common cause of oppression. This time, however, the stumbling block is the method of action when trying to transform society. Hardly any

options exist for women from any class, because of the extent of their oppression.

Chapter Five explores the new path of the choice of action, Union Ouvrière. Here the synthesis depends ultimately on implied equality between men and women, both within the proposed working class organisation for self improvement and in the labour market. There is little reference to gender relationships in the division of labour, nor is there a critique of family structure, but the expectation that men will willingly strive to obtain a '1789' for women is the main weakness to this approach.

Chapter Six shows how, during her final journey, Flora Tristan's appeals to working class men to liberate women fell on deaf ears, and how women's plight as workers was the cause of great concern to her. Nonetheless, she found herself committed to the overall improvement of the working class rather than to one gender.

This thesis has explored the intellectual itinerary of Flora Tristan in order to reveal just how difficult it is to achieve a synthesis of feminism and socialism. The enormity of the task Flora Tristan undertook during her short career as a militant is therefore appraised in the light of the difficulties she encountered, leaving us to consider that fragility is the essence of any possible affinity of interests of gender and class. When we look at subsequent developments, it becomes clear that there is no absolute, no definite way forward. Historical conditions change with the result that the goal posts are constantly

moving. Any synthesis attempted will be according to whatever historical conditions determine the priorities within feminism and socialism at that given time. I have explored the historical conditions within which Flora Tristan travelled in the hope that they might shed some light on the way forward.

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For methodological reasons, this thesis has been based upon Flora Tristan's own ideological output together with works on feminism and socialism. The use of other primary sources has not been deemed vital.

Firstly, no extensive primary sources in the form of personal papers or correspondence have survived. It will be remembered that Flora Tristan never returned to her flat in Paris: that her few personal effects were handed over to Eléonore Blanc, or were confiscated by the police during her tour of France. Puech was given some of her papers by Blanc's family.

Secondly, what primary sources exist already have been thoroughly examined by many, including Puech, Desanti, Dijkstra, Moses and Rabine; indeed Puech's work is the most authoritative source to which all Flora Tristan scholars have referred.

The late 1988 references to Cuche and Struminger have been added during the final corrections, July 1989.

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## APPENDIX I

## Biography of Flora Tristan

Flora Tristan was born in 1803 of a Peruvian-Spanish father, of aristocratic birth, and a French mother, an emigrée. Her parents' religious marriage ceremony, which took place in Spain, did not fulfil any legal requirements. The result of this was that their children were illegitimate. The family situation was made even more precarious when their Paris home was confiscated by the French government after the death of her father, Mariano de Tristan, in 1807, because of the war with Spain.

The rest of Flora Tristan's childhood was spent in the country. Her miserable existence was brightened only by her mother's recall of glories of the de Tristan family. Flora Tristan received no formal education. The discovery of her illegitimacy was a severe blow to the fifteen year old Flora Tristan.

She returned to Paris with her mother in 1818. Contrary to her aspirations of a romantic existence in keeping with her aristocratic background, Flora Tristan was driven by poverty to seek employment. She became a colourist in a lithographic shop. Within a year she had married her employer, André Chazal.

The marriage was a disaster. After four years, in 1825, Flora Tristan, pregnant, fled to the country with her two sons. She never lived with Chazal or even with her three children together again. Her mother helped to look after the children or else they were put in care. Her two sons, who returned to the custody of their father, did not survive their teens. Her daughter Aline, the only one of her children for whom she felt any affection, spent much of her childhood in boarding schools.

Because of the abolition of divorce by the Restoration Monarchy, Flora Tristan was in an impossible situation. It was at this stage that she described herself as a "pariah". Furthermore, the Napoleonic *Code Civil* gave the husband and father all rights over wife and children. Chazal pursued his wife in an effort to recover his rights. There were frequent ugly scenes in public between the estranged couple.

In order to earn her living, Flora Tristan worked as a ladies' maid and travelling companion. She was able to provide for her children in this way. Her job took her to England and other parts of Europe, though she subsequently destroyed all records of this episode of her life.

In 1832, Flora Tristan travelled to Peru to seek her inheritance, without success. Her uncle, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the newly independent country, refused to recognise her as other than his illegitimate niece. She returned to France in 1834 with a small annuity and a wealth of experiences which she used as material for her

travel diary, Pérégrinations d'une Paria, whereupon her uncle immediately ceased paying her annuity and had the book publicly burnt in Aréquipa.

In 1835, Flora Tristan began associating with the socialists and artists of Paris and London. She met Enfantin and other Saint-Simonian men and women such as Pauline Roland and Eugénie Niboyet, Fourier, Considérant, leading Chartists, Robert Owen and Anna Wheeler.

However, her intellectual activities were interrupted frequently by marital problems in the shape of a very jealous husband pursuing her both for a share in her earnings and for custody of children even though he was most unfit for child care - at one stage he was imprisoned on a charge of incest.

In 1835, Flora Tristan published a pamphlet Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes étrangères, proposing an international association of solidarity which would improve travel facilities for women. She visited London as an observer around this time and made many contacts among activists there. In 1836 she presented a petition to the *Chambre des Députés* for the restoration of divorce.

The book Pérégrinations d'une Paria was ready for publication in December 1837, and Flora Tristan's only novel Néphis was published in 1838. That same year, Chazal, infuriated by his wife's success, and driven to despair because of the failure of his own career, shot Flora Tristan in broad daylight. She recovered sufficiently to make a

sensational appearance at the trial. She also presented a petition to the *Chambre des Députés* for the abolition of the death penalty.

Chazal's sentence of life imprisonment solved Flora Tristan's marital problems, although she was not free to remarry. Chazal served seventeen years' hard labour. He died in his bed of old age, four years after his release.

By this stage, her family life in tatters, Flora Tristan's public career was taking shape. Sales of her books increased due to the publicity of Chazal's trial, during which the counsel for the defence quoted extracts from *Pérégrinations d'une Paria* as evidence of Flora Tristan's immoral life.

After 1838, Flora Tristan was able to concentrate fully on her writings and political engagements. Her small Paris flat in the *rue de Bac* became a favourite meeting place of socialist intellectuals. She travelled to London for the third time and renewed acquaintances there. The result of her visits to London, *Promenades dans Londres*, took the form of a series of sketches on various aspects of the class system of English society. The sketches, which included a study of prostitution and a study of marriage in the upper classes, constituted a powerful condemnation of the oppression of women. The first edition in 1840 received favourable reviews from French socialists. A second edition was published in 1842 to include a dedication to the working class. By then Flora Tristan was fully committed to working towards a plan of action to implement socialism. All literary commitments were abandoned.



In 1843, when no publisher would have anything to do with her project, Flora Tristan succeeded in getting publication of her programme, Union Ouvrière, financed by collecting subscriptions from sympathetic friends and acquaintances.

Her plan was self-emancipation for the working classes to end their poverty and misery. It was a call to the working class to form a powerful association using small subscriptions from each of the twenty five million workers in France, and later in other countries. It included a demand for equality for women, in order to end their double exploitation at home and at work.

From April to September 1844, she set out on the route of the *Tour de France des Compagnons* to preach her idea of Union Ouvrière. Sadly, her journey ended in Bordeaux, where she fell ill on 20 September and died on 14 November at the age of 41, in the home of Charles and Elisa Lemonnier, two Saint-Simonians. Her diaries of this period were published posthumously in 1973.

After her mother's death, Aline married Clovis Gauguin, a journalist, who had to leave France after the coup d'état by Louis Napoleon in 1852 because of his republican sympathies. She followed her mother's example and took a trip to Peru, which proved fatal for Gauguin. They had a son, Paul, the impressionist painter.

## Appendix II

Copies of petitions sent by Flora Tristan to the *Chambre des Députés*  
obtained from *Les Archives Nationales*, Paris.

À Messieurs les Députés.

Président de la Chambre  
des Députés

Messieurs.

Je prie que vous ne voyiez pas seulement le fait individuel de ma demande dans la pétition que j'ai l'honneur de vous adresser pour le rétablissement du divorce. Les maux que procurent l'indissolubilité du mariage ont un caractère de généralité qui frappe les yeux de tous. Dieu n'a donné la continuité qu'à un bien petit nombre de nos affections, et nous voudrions imposer l'immuabilité à la plus variable de toutes ! Devant cette institution contre nature s'évanouissent le bonheur domestique et les mœurs publiques. Il est superflu de démontrer que la concorde entre époux, comme dans toute espèce d'association, ne peut résulter que de rapports d'égalité ; que l'union hideuse du Despotisme et de la servitude pervertit le maître et l'esclave, et que telle est notre nature, qu'il n'est pas d'affection que la dépendance n'anéantisse. Les vérités morales doivent vous être familières, Messieurs, car, quel titre aurait eu aux suffrages de ses concitoyens, celui d'entre vous qui n'en serait pas pénétré ?

Messieurs notre glorieuse révolution eut l'athéisme pour but, et elle fut accueillie par les acclamations des Français. Toutes les formes gouvernementales qu'elle établit firent place à garantir la Déesse et à favoriser le développement de cette liberté divine qui renferme toutes les autres.

Elle continua l'œuvre Du Christ; reconnut comme conséquence naturelle de la liberté de la pensée, l'indépendance Des affections, lui donna aussi l'existence légale, et jusqu'au jour Des Mariages à ceux qui consentaient encore à le porter: le divorce par consentement mutuel ou par la volonté d'une Des parties fut institué; et la séparation De fait étant suivie de la séparation légale, le législateur ne fut plus forcé par le Dogme à l'absurdité De reconnaître une paternité fictive. Cette fiction, inséparable De l'impossibilité Du mariage, indique suffisamment l'impuissance De la législation pour prévenir les Dérègles qui naissent De la violence exercée sur la liberté Des affections, D'ordres que manifeste tous les jours davantage, le nombre croissant Des enfants naturels.

ARCHIVES  
JONKES Le Despotisme a besoin que d'obéissance. Napoléon aurait voulu faire Du divorce un privilège royalien. Ne l'étant pas, il lui imposa des conditions outrageantes à la pudeur des familles, et souvent impossibles à remplir. Il en fit presque exclusivement le droit Du mari et en détermina les effets d'une manière anti morale et arbitraire. Oriva la Chambre intouchable dont les coryphées s'écrièrent que la loi était athée. Elle est sans doute athée dans celles De ses Dispositions qui substituent la volonté d'un homme à la voix Du couple; mais aux yeux De ces messieurs, l'athéisme De la loi était dans son isolement Du Dogme catholique. Il fallait l'y faire rentrer, et ces élus Du parti rétrograde abrogèrent le divorce et ôtèrent ainsi Du code le seul remède aux malheurs extrêmes résultant Des chaînes De l'ervitude qu'il renferme. Ils se précipitèrent dans cette voie avec une aveugle terreur: en rendant la Duré Des mariages existant alors, perpétuelle De facultative qu'elle était, ils donnèrent à cette loi un effet rétroactif et se mirent en opposition avec le principe De la liberté Des cultes inscrit dans la Charte.

Qui aurait jamais pensé en juillet 1830 que ce monument  
civique de la (gothique assemblée) subsisterait encore en 1877?  
Et jeune repêché la chambre des Députés l'abattit de son vote;  
à deux reprises les pairs de Charles X le soutinrent des leurs.  
ses pieds dans la tombe, ces vieux courtisans défendent toujours  
les mœurs de leur temps. (N<sup>o</sup> 111  
1877)

La loi anti-sociale a porté les fruits: il existe en  
France plus de 300,000 mariages dénués, et les déclarations  
annuelles des enfants naturels reconnus constatent l'accroissement  
progressif du nombre de personnes qui se soustraient à un lien  
que rien ne peut rompre, qui enchaîne également à perpétuité  
le jeune homme que l'amour ou l'ambition a séduit, comme  
la jeune fille que les parents ont contrainte: qui punit —  
l'erreur d'un instant par les tourments de la vie entière, l'obéissance  
filiale par un long esclavage. Les mœurs qui résultent de cet  
état de choses ne s'accroissent l'accroissent avec les habitudes graves  
du siècle et la carrière de progrès que parcourt la génération  
actuelle. Vous reconnaîtrez Messieurs, avec tous les publicistes,  
que, sans le divorce la religion et la morale sont impuissantes  
pour faire naître des mœurs régulières et qu'à cette régularité sont  
attachés la prospérité publique et le bonheur domestique; que  
l'union des époux aurait incontestablement plus de durée avec  
la faculté de se séparer qu'elle n'en peut avoir par les clauses  
pénales de la loi et le pouvoir dont elle a armé le mari. Ces  
pays protestants ont admis le divorce: les mœurs y sont-elles moins  
pures que dans les pays où le règne de l'indissolubilité maintient  
les effets civils du mariage lorsque les époux se sont séparés?

J'ai fait, Messieurs, une rude épreuve des malheurs —  
qu'entraîne l'indissolubilité du mariage. Forcée, quoique sans  
fortune, de me séparer d'avec mon mari, j'ai dû très jeune encore,  
pourvoir seule par mon travail à mes besoins et à ceux de mes  
enfants. Il est rare qu'un tel fardeau n'exécède pas les forces des  
femmes. Il en est peu qui reçoivent une éducation appropriée à

une profession, et lorsque, sans fortune, elles sont délaissées  
par leurs maris, ou obligées de se séparer d'avec eux, c'est à la loi  
qu'il faut attribuer les unions illicites qu'elles forment puisque  
cette loi ne leur permet pas d'en contracter de légales qui  
assurent à leurs enfants la protection d'un père.

Messieurs, Dans un ouvrage que j'ai publié récemment  
et dont j'ai l'honneur de faire hommage à la Chambre, j'ai laissé  
entendre une partie des maux auxquels sont exposées les femmes  
qui se trouvent dans ma position. L'intérêt personnel n'est  
pas le mobile de la démarche que je fais auprès de vous: j'y ai  
été portée par amour pour mes semblables, convaincue que je  
suis par ma propre expérience qu'il ne peut exister de bonheur  
dans les familles que sous un régime de liberté. Le Christ a dit:  
"Ne séparez pas ce que Dieu a joint." Ne pourrait-on compléter  
le précepte en ajoutant: "Ne joignez pas ce que Dieu a séparé."

En conséquence de ce qui précède, j'ai l'honneur de  
demander à la Chambre de rétablir le divorce et de  
l'instituer sur le principe de réciprocité et à la volonté de  
l'un des conjoints, ainsi que l'avaient fait les lois antérieures  
au code Napoléon. REVUE  
A. 12 5 12

Agitez, Messieurs les Députés, l'assurance  
de ma haute considération.

Stora *Tristram*

pas (sic) en un c. 500

(17)  
Paris le 26 7 1854.

C 256, 27. 71, 20 pice

N° 70

C 2163

Messieurs les membres du  
Chambre de Dijon

Président de la  
Chambre de  
Dijon

LES  
NATIONALES

Messieurs,

J'ai l'honneur de vous adresser  
une pétition pour l'abolition de la  
peine de mort. J'en ai fait imprimer  
un grand nombre afin de pouvoir la distribuer à tous les  
membres j'en prie, vous seriez  
plus agréable de la recevoir ainsi qu'en  
transmission

Messieurs de la

Avec la plus haute  
considération et la plus humble  
dévotion  
Charles Thibault

(A)  
Paris le 19 août 1898

100 bis rue du Caire

C 2163 n° 70

*N° 1*

*2163*

A messieurs les membres  
DE LA CHAMBRE DES DÉPUTÉS.

*Donné  
à la commission  
d'enquête*

*Il y a un an*

MESSEIERS,

Quand on songe que, chaque année, plus de 6,000 condamnés sortent des maisons de réclusion et des bagnes, où, pendant la durée de leur peine, ils se sont exercés comme élèves ou comme professeurs dans la science du crime; — quand on songe que, sur vingt-cinq millions de prolétaires, plus des trois quarts n'ont eu les moyens d'apprendre aucun métier, aucune industrie, et en sont réduits, pour vivre, à l'emploi précaire de leurs forces; — quand on songe que 500,000 in-

ARCHIVES  
17 OCT 1872

*Donné à la commission d'enquête  
Cobden D 139.*



divulgués, hommes et femmes, sont antérieurement riviés les uns aux autres pour toujours; que 250,000 jeunes filles passent de la servitude de famille à l'esclavage conjugal; en réfléchissant à tous ces éléments de dissolution, on répète avec l'instructeur des rois : *Dieu protège la France!*

Nous n'avons encore su préserver la société qu'en retranchant de son sein ceux qui l'attaquent. Notre régime pénitentiaire ne réforme aucun coupable, et les déplorables résultats qu'il produit expliquent l'hésitation du législateur; il a craint, en abolissant la peine de mort, de compromettre la sûreté publique, et, par son refus, il a reconnu son impuissance à prévenir les causes du crime et à établir des peines qui corrigent.

Cependant, Messieurs, la progression toujours croissante des crimes ne permet plus de rester dans l'inaction; la question judiciaire résume les autres questions de l'ordre social; car les infractions aux lois déterminent, par leur nombre, le progrès ou le pervertissement de la société; — et je crois que c'est un devoir impérieux, pour une assemblée légalement considérée comme investie des pouvoirs du peuple, de s'en occuper avant toute chose.

Le premier, le grand objet social, est d'assurer le pain à tous. — De cette obligation découle celle d'établir des écoles d'apprentissage. — La sécurité de tous, qui ne peut exister sans l'indépendance de chacun, est parallèle en importance à cette première obligation de la société envers ses membres. — Que la femme jouisse des mêmes droits civils que l'homme ; — que l'éducation professionnelle des enfants soit assurée par l'État, alors les trois quarts des tribunaux et des hospices d'enfants trouvés pourront être supprimés.

L'agression de l'individu contre la société est une telle folie, qu'elle n'a lieu que lorsque la faim ou des passions exaspérées la provoquent. — La misère, le manque d'ouvrage ou de profession, telles sont les causes premières des attaques contre la propriété ; mais le plus grand nombre des meurtres et tentatives d'assassinat ont d'autres motifs que le vol<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> M. James de Laurence, auteur d'ouvrages remarquables, dans son livre : *Introduction to the empire of the Nairs*, établit qu'en Angleterre, sur trois meurtres, un a été commis par un homme ou une femme pour se soustraire au joug du mariage, un autre par la jeune fille qui tue son enfant, ou par l'amant qui tue sa maîtresse enceinte, afin d'éviter d'être contraint à l'épouser par l'officier de la paroisse, et qu'un tiers seulement des meurtres doit être attribué à l'avarice, la haine, la vengeance, et la misère. M. de Laurence

L'infanticide a sa raison dans le préjugé monstrueux qui flétrit la fille devenue mère, et les deux tiers des empoisonnements, des assassinats ont pour motifs les jalousies, les haines qui résultent de l'indissolubilité du mariage et de la servitude de la femme.

Organisés d'après leur destination, tous les êtres sont bien au sortir des mains de Dieu; mais les institutions sociales les modifient diversement, et font leurs vices ou leurs vertus. La société ne saurait donc avoir d'injure à venger; car il n'y a d'infractions à ses lois que parce que celles-ci contra-

a recueilli en Allemagne et en France quantité d'observations qui prouveraient que cette proportion dans les diverses causes des meurtres est à peu près la même dans les pays de l'Europe où le divorce n'est pas admis.

M. de Laurence fait observer qu'il n'est pas le premier à signaler les crimes qui résultent de l'indissolubilité du mariage. Avant la révolution française, il parut un pamphlet portant pour titre : *Le Cri d'un honnête homme qui réclame le divorce*, dans lequel on lit que, pendant l'année 1769, la Tournelle a prononcé, à Paris, sur vingt et un procès entre maris et femmes pour crimes de poison, d'assassinat, etc.

Il y a quelque temps, le marquis d'Herbouville s'exprimait ainsi dans la Chambre des Pairs : « Les crimes des maris contre leurs femmes et des femmes contre leurs maris sont si fréquents, que le poison semble faire partie du bouquet nuptial, et le poignard être un ornement du lit conjugal. »

rient celles de la création, ou parce que les coupables n'ont pas été dressés à les observer.

L'enfant jette et brise les objets dont il ne sait pas faire usage : — Les sociétés dans l'enfance tuent l'homme, dont elles ne savent pas se servir. Il n'est pas d'animaux sauvages qu'un traitement convenable ne parvienne à dompter, et il n'est pas d'homme qui ne puisse être dressé à une règle quelconque quand cette règle n'est pas en opposition avec la nature. Ceux qui se sont laissé pervertir par l'influence des circonstances dont ils étaient environnés seront réformés par l'influence en sens inverse d'autres circonstances; et l'être le plus vicieux, le plus coupable envers les lois peut devenir un membre utile à la société par un régime moral et hygiénique approprié à sa nature et aux modifications que lui a fait subir le milieu dans lequel il a vécu.

Le dommage causé à la propriété ne peut se réparer que par le travail; c'est aussi par le travail et l'instruction que la réforme du coupable s'effectuera. Mais quant aux crimes qu'enfantent les passions, c'est aux lois qui les compriment qu'il faut en demander compte.

Sous les titres génériques de *personnes* et de

*propriétés* peuvent très-certainement être compris les crimes et délits de toute nature; mais le Code en a institué une classe spéciale contre l'État. Sans justice exceptionnelle, le despotisme ne pourrait exercer l'arbitraire; les légistes courtisans de Napoléon lui en fournirent dans le Code pénal l'instrument le plus flexible et le plus terrible au moyen des vagues définitions de délits et de la fréquence de la peine de mort.

Messieurs, quel bien est-il résulté pour la société de l'application de la peine de mort?..... Les crimes ont-ils diminué?..... — Non, non certes! — Nous voyons l'homme affronter la mort pour un morceau de pain, pour satisfaire sa haine, son amour, ou venger son injure, et nous croirions encore qu'elle peut le détourner de l'infraction des lois?.....

Je suis loin de désirer que les garanties de la société lui soient enlevées; que la brebis demeure exposée à la dent du loup, la victime à la haine de son assassin. Sans aucun doute, le meurtrier doit être mis dans l'impossibilité d'attenter de nouveau aux jours de ses semblables, et quand la cupidité, la haine ou la folie vont jusqu'au meurtre, il n'est guère de signes de guérison qui puissent rassurer le législateur. — Le meurtrier

doit pour toujours être séparé de la société; mais là est la limite de notre droit, et c'est sans nécessité que la sollicitude pour notre conservation la dépasse.

Du point de vue économique, la peine de mort est une absurdité, puisqu'elle prive la société d'individus qu'un régime rationnel eût utilisés; et lorsqu'on considère combien sont incomplets les moyens d'instruction et d'apprentissage pour le peuple, et qu'on analyse le code de servitude qui préside à l'organisation des familles, la peine de mort paraît une révoltante atrocité. — Enfin du point de vue religieux la question est depuis longtemps jugée : — il n'appartient qu'à Dieu de fixer le terme de l'existence qu'il a donnée.

« *Tu ne tueras pas :* » a dit au pied du Sinaï, il y a trente-deux siècles, le berger révélateur des volontés divines. — Et Jésus : « Vous ne tuerez point, vous ne porterez point faux témoignage, et vous aimerez votre prochain comme vous-même. » — Et les préceptes de ces deux législateurs sont empreints dans la conscience des hommes.

Messieurs, la loi ne saurait s'isoler de la base de toute religion : l'amour de Dieu et du prochain.

— Hors de là, elle devient oppressive; perd le respect des peuples, n'a plus de durée que par la force; et, pour la faire exécuter, il faut des gendarmes, des geôliers et des bourreaux.

D'après les considérations ci-dessus énoncées, j'ai l'honneur de prier la Chambre, et la supplie instamment d'abolir la peine de mort.

Agréez, Messieurs les Députés, l'assurance de ma très-haute considération.

FLORA TRISTAN.

Paris, ce 10 décembre 1838.

*Flora Tristan*

*Paris le 19 Dec 1838*

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